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Wier, Joseph S., Jr.

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# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

### **SYRIAN CIVIL WAR: SOLVING THE PRISONER'S DILEMMA**

by

Joseph S. Wier, Jr.  
Fahed Musbeh Afnan Al Reshoud

December 2014

Thesis Advisor:  
Co-Advisor:

Glenn E. Robinson  
Frank Giordano

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**SYRIAN CIVIL WAR: SOLVING THE PRISONER'S DILEMMA**

Joseph S. Wier, Jr.  
Major, United States Army  
B.A., University of South Alabama, 2002

Fahed Musbeh Afnan Al Reshoud  
Lieutenant Colonel, Jordanian Army  
B.A., Mu'th University, 1993

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
December 2014**

Authors: Joseph S. Wier, Jr.  
Fahed Musbeh Afnan Al Reshoud

Approved by: Dr. Glenn E. Robinson  
Thesis Advisor

Dr. Frank Giordano  
Co-Advisor

Dr. John Arquilla  
Chair, Department of Defense Analysis

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## **ABSTRACT**

Most international observers believe there are no suitable solutions to the Syrian civil war. They are wrong. By initially establishing the integral principle that the fighting in Syria is a microcosm of the regional cold war being fought between Iran and Saudi Arabia, we recognize that any resolution must satisfy these “veto players.” Utilizing game theory to evaluate the war, our research deconstructs the problematic position the parties have backed themselves into: perpetual fighting even though peace is more beneficial to everyone involved.

The lens of the “prisoner’s dilemma,” which focuses on rational players acting counter to their best interests due to a lack of trust, helps us identify why both groups are driven to continue down a violent path instead of indulging in suspicion during the peace process. This analysis effectively demonstrates what the international community has failed to realize: a military stalemate is the optimal circumstance for reaching a lasting peace in Syria. This utilization of game theory, while obviously relevant to resolving one of today’s most precarious conflicts, also has larger implications for civil wars. These sorts of clashes are increasingly more commonplace, and an effective resolution knowledge base is necessary for a stable international environment.



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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COA	Course of Action
DA	Defense Analysis
GLONASS	Global Navigation Satellite System
IF	Islamic Front
IFLB	Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain
IRA	Ireland Republican Army
IS	Islamic State
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JN	Jabhat al-Nusra
NPS	Naval Postgraduate School
PIRA	Provincial Irish Republican Army
SFA	Syrian Free Army
UDA	Ulster Defense Association
U.S.	United States



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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. OVERVIEW

“If the parties don’t want peace, we can’t bring it to them.”

–General John Shalikashvili,  
Former chair, Joint Chiefs of Staff, U.S. Armed Forces

“The arming of the opposition ... seems not to have advanced the opposition’s cause but to have given the regime the justification for crushing it.”

–Patrick Seale  
Journalist and Middle East Expert

The Syrian civil war is a bloody conflict that has raged since 2011. According to the Syrian Observer for Human Rights’ declaration in February 2014, the war has claimed the lives of over 140,000 people and injured many more.<sup>1</sup> The civil war has morphed from an intrastate war to a war with global implications. The conflict’s outcome will have far-ranging effects on both regional and global powers.

A modern Middle Eastern cold war has developed in the region between Iran and Saudi Arabia.<sup>2</sup> This new cold war is comparable to the Arab cold war of the 1960s between Republicans in Egypt and Royalists in Saudi Arabia.<sup>3</sup> In both cases, each side views the regional competition as a zero sum game, with a goal of dominance throughout the area, which can only be achieved by building coalitions with other Middle Eastern countries. Interestingly, the war is not being fought directly between the regional powers, but, instead, through proxy forces.

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<sup>1</sup> Erika Soloman, “Syria’s Death Toll now Exceeds 140,000: Activist Group,” *Huffington Post*, 15 February 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/02/15/syria-death-toll\\_n\\_4794010.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/02/15/syria-death-toll_n_4794010.html).

<sup>2</sup> Gregory F. Gause III, *Beyond Sectarianism: The New Middle East Cold War* (Doha, Qatar: Foreign Policy at Brookings, 2014), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal abd al Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-1970*, 3rd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 2.

The Arab uprisings of 2011–2012 have deepened the divisions of the new Arab cold war, including along Sunni-Shia lines. And like the earlier cold war, the contemporary one features competing approaches to intervention in the affairs of other Arab states.<sup>4</sup>

The main flashpoint of this rivalry is currently in Syria, with other regional clashes occurring between the antagonists in Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq, and Yemen. The domestic belligerents are Bashar Assad's Alawite Regime and the forces opposing him, mostly composed of Sunni Arabs. Iran supports the current Syrian regime and Saudi Arabia supports the opposition force. If the opposition can overthrow Assad, then the Saudi government can dominate the Levant. If Assad remains in control, Iran maintains its Shia crescent into the Mediterranean Sea via Iraq, Syria, and Lebanese Hezbollah. Clearly, either outcome will have far-ranging effects for both sides.

## **B. IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM**

Even though the optimal state for any people or group is peace, because war wastes resources, money, and human lives, civil wars are difficult to end, and they tend to last much longer than conventional wars. In 1999, it was estimated that, on average, civil wars last 16 years.<sup>5</sup> Credible commitment and the lack of trust between warring parties are two reasons why this type of battle endures longer than conventional wars.<sup>6</sup> In the case of Syria, neither the government nor the rebels has confidence that the opponent will fulfill its part of the negotiated treaty. War continues.

The Syrian civil war is also exacerbated by a prisoner's dilemma, a conundrum where two individuals or groups may not cooperate, even though it is in their best interest to do so.<sup>7</sup> This lack of cooperation forces the parties to renege on the solution that would have given them the best outcome. To make matters worse, using the Nash Arbitration/

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<sup>4</sup> Ryan Curtis, "New Arab Cold War," Middle East Research and Information Project, 12 March 2014, <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer262/new-arab-cold-war-struggle-syria>.

<sup>5</sup> James Fearon, "Why Do Some Civil Wars Last so Much Longer than Others?" *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no.3 (July 2002): 275–301, doi:10.1177/0022343304043770.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Avinash K. Dixit and Barry J. Nalebuff, *Thinking Strategically: The Competitive Edge in Business, Politics, and Everyday Life* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993), 95.

Fair Point to make the best decision you can while considering the opposition's optimal decision, is also to default on the agreement.<sup>8</sup> People choose betrayal in this game because of fear aggravated by credible commitment. Cooperation is dreaded because it places parties in danger of ending up with the worst possible result. Being anxious about a disastrous outcome causes the actors to choose a path that prevents them from optimizing their position. Instead of negotiating a settlement, the war perpetuates itself.

The Syrian Civil War has been festering since 2011. According to James Fearon in "Why Do Some Civil Wars Last so Much Longer than Others," modern civil war duration is approximately 16 years.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the Syrian civil war will last many more years. Suffering from a lack of trust, both sides are trapped in the prisoners' dilemma. This is to be expected. Each group has fought and committed atrocities for numerous years. Still, the rebels are the ones in the more precarious position during negotiations because they must disarm and return land to the government. In exchange, they are given a tenuous promise that they will have a stake in the new government. Having given up their tactical advantages, the rebels are now defenseless if the government tears up this treaty.<sup>10</sup>

Breaking this cycle requires techniques utilized in other conflicts that have been peacefully resolved. These techniques include establishing autonomous regions, giving rebels equal representation in the government and army, allowing rebels to disarm incrementally, and having non-biased third party peace keepers enforce the treaty. Some or all of these are necessary to overcome the amalgam of problems that got the parties to this point.

Satisfying primary third-party supporters is another hurdle combatants must overcome to achieve peace. Veto players must be content with the negotiated

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<sup>8</sup> Avinash K. Dixit and Barry J. Nalebuff, *Thinking Strategically: The Competitive Edge in Business, Politics, and Everyday Life*, 95.

<sup>9</sup> Fearon, "Why Do Some Civil Wars," 275

<sup>10</sup> Barbara F. Walter and Jack Snyder, eds., *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

settlement.<sup>11</sup> Ironically, the internal belligerents may want peace, but the veto players may not want a settlement because their goals or objectives have not been achieved. Saudi Arabia and Iran are the veto players in the Syrian civil war. Some may argue that Qatar, Turkey, Russia, and the United States are veto players, but they should be classified as influential external actors. Iran and Saudi Arabia must be placated in order to have a stable resolution.

The long-roiling Syrian civil war that has settled into a mutually destructive military stalemate produces a situation that is optimal for a negotiated settlement. This scenario occurs when the adversaries in the conflict find themselves locked in a state from which they are unable to achieve victory, and the deadlock is painful to both sides of the conflict.<sup>12</sup> Both sides are hurting within the Syrian conflict, and both sides would prefer settlement to continued warfare.

### **C. PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

Keeping in mind that the United States and its regional allies would benefit from a peaceful resolution, the purpose of this thesis is to develop a suitable outcome to the Syrian civil war. This solution takes into account both domestic belligerents and the third-party veto players.

This paper incorporates game theory, historical civil war resolutions, case studies, and analysis of both the domestic belligerents and third-party actors to generate an optimal resolution. Utilizing game theory, this thesis develops acceptable conclusions to the conflict. These potential solutions incorporate knowledge gained from mediation settlements of past civil wars. The thesis also details how each country will be impacted from the resolution of the conflict.

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<sup>11</sup> David E. Cunningham, "Veto Players and Civil War Duration" (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of California San Diego, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> I. William Zartman, "Dynamics and Constraints in Negotiations in Internal Conflicts," in *Elusive Peace: Negotiating an End to Civil Wars*, ed. I. William Zartman (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1995), 11.

## **D. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

What strategies and techniques could be used in the Syrian civil war that will satisfy both domestic belligerents and third-party veto players? How will these solutions shape the future of the region?

## **E. HYPOTHESIS**

Through utilization of various components, the thesis determines three of the most suitable solutions to the Syrian civil war.

### **1. Hypothesis 1 (Regional Solution)**

A regional solution is developed to satisfy both Iran and Saudi Arabia. Iran promises not to interfere in Bahrain, Yemen, and Kuwait. Iran will also make Bashar Assad include Sunnis in government. A minority Sunni inclusion that allows Assad to maintain control of Syria, but pacifies a currently disenfranchised group, will still serve to make strides towards peace. This Sunni inclusion could also serve to placate Saudi interests in the region because even if this is not an all-out victory for Saudi Arabia it initiates the process of Saudi interest inclusion.

Saudi Arabia will stop supporting the opposition in Syria and allow Assad to remain in power. If Assad maintains control of Syria, Iran can still project influence from Tehran to southern Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, and maintain greater regional stability in Bahrain, Kuwait, and Yemen.

### **2. Hypothesis 2 (Autonomous Regions)**

The state of Syria is broken into three autonomous parts: a Kurdish region, an Alawite region, and a Sunni region. Kurds retain their region in northeast Syria and may merge with Iraqi Kurds. Since the Alawite region is along the coast, they maintain control of Damascus. This split allows Iran to have at least part of Syria and a connection to Hezbollah in southern Lebanon. This also allows Russia to maintain its port of Tartus along the coast of Syria.



The Sunnis would have an autonomous region in the Syrian state from the middle of the region to the western border, and possibly into western Iraq. This would weaken the Syrian and Iraqi governments and give Riyadh a friendly state in the Levant and Iraq. This new Arab state would help even out the balance of power in the Middle East.

This solution can be under the overarching umbrella of a weakened Syrian central government such as the Iraqi Kurds, or the autonomous regions can be thought of as independent states. The autonomous regions would also have to divide oil and natural gas revenue and discuss representation within the weakened central government.

### **3. Hypothesis 3 (Lebanese Agreement)**

This agreement would be a power-sharing agreement based on ethnicity or religion. The amount of representation could be based on population distribution, but does not have to be determined by this factor. The groups could split political and military positions. The Kurds, Alawites, and Sunnis would determine this split. This would require a non-biased international peace force to allow groups to disarm and ensure cooperation to the stated agreement.

## **F. METHODOLOGY**

This thesis utilizes game theory to show a fresh way the Syrian civil war can be viewed and how it has progressed throughout the previous three years. It uses game theory to determine how to break the current mutually destructive stalemate to come to a resolution of the conflict. The game involves two players, the Syrian belligerents and the veto players, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Iran and Saudi Arabia represent both sides of the conflict, and represent other external players who are tied to the conflict. Because these players can even veto a deal that the domestic belligerents support, they must be satisfied to gain a long-lasting solution to the conflict.

The thesis analyzes the conflict and determines that the Syrian civil war is currently a prisoners' dilemma: both sides cannot agree to a peaceful solution even though it is in their best interest, and the default for each party is to continue fighting

because of a lack of trust. Therefore, a mediator is required to change the situation and gain a suitable solution for all players.

The game theory branch matrix reveals how difficult obtaining peace can be in a civil war. Then, the four phases through which the Syrian civil war has progressed will be evaluated: war entry, opposition advantage, Assad advantage, and the current mutually destructive military stalemate. Each phase has been analyzed through the lenses of strategic moves, security levels, and Nash Arbitration/Fair Point Solution. These analyses reveal how the current military gridlock can be broken, and evaluate the impact of each Course of Action (COA) on the domestic belligerents and their external supporters, ignoring the possibilities of continuation of war or one side defeating the other outright. Instead, it focuses on the peaceful negotiation of the conflict, evaluating the COAs with respect to all actors.

Chapter I provides the overview, purpose, scope, and research question that will be addressed in this thesis. Chapter II identifies the application of game theory to the thesis and discusses conflict resolution principles used previously. Chapter III provides insight into the true nature of the war in Syria, which has become a regional struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Chapter IV discusses possible alternate negotiation zones outside of Syria which will allow for a negotiated peace settlement in Syria. Chapter V is the two-player game between Iran and Saudi Arabia. There are multiple games which represent the changing segments of the war. Chapter VI provides insight into techniques which were used to obtain previous peace deals in Northern Ireland, Yemen, and Lebanon. Chapter VII concludes the thesis with recommendations about how to end the conflict.

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## **II. EXISTING APPROACHES TO GAME THEORY AND CIVIL WAR RESOLUTION**

The major bodies of knowledge that will inform this thesis are game theory and civil war conflict resolution. Applying game theory to the Syrian civil war is a novel approach that has not been attempted in the current body of literature. Politicians and political scientists have offered potential settlements to the Syrian civil war, but all of these recommendations have been focused on internal resolution. The conflict is a regional, as opposed to local, conflict and mediators must study regional assets in order to generate a successful solution.

### **A. GAME THEORY**

Game theory is a useful tool for analyzing strategic behavior and finding solutions to numerous military, political, and economic issues.

Strategic behavior, the hallmark of game theory, involves how one agent (e.g., person, nation, ruler, firm, government, or institution) behaves when its choice is interdependent with that of others. Interactive choices that cause players' payoffs to be interdependent are viewed as strategic. Strategic behavior also includes a recognition of this interdependence; one player thinks that the opponent(s) will behave in a certain manner and acts on this belief. Similarly, the opponent anticipates the other player's belief-based actions and chooses a strategy based on this belief.<sup>13</sup>

This research uses game theory to reveal potential remedies for the Syrian conflict that will benefit both sides of the civil war. The initial assumption is that the Syrian civil war is a form of the prisoner's dilemma. This predicament occurs between two people who have been arrested for a crime, and is illustrated in the following:

- If person A and person B both betray the other, each of them serves two years in prison.
- If A betrays B, but B remains silent, A will be set free and B will serve three years in prison and vice versa.

---

<sup>13</sup> Todd Sandler, "Economic Analysis of Conflict." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44, no. 6 (December 6, 2000), 724, <http://web.mit.edu/sabre/vln/Public/GameTheory/Journal%20of%20Conflict%20Resolution/Economic%20Analysis%20of%20Conflict.pdf>.

- If both A and B remain silent, both of them will serve one year.<sup>14</sup>

This model can be applied to situations such as international tariffs, cartel oil production, and anti-trust cases. The best strategy is for both parties to remain silent and cooperate with one another, but fear and distrust drive them to renege on the deal. Assuming both betray the other due to this fear, the prisoners' dilemma ultimately leads to both players obtaining suboptimal resolution. Civil wars are also analogous to the prisoners' dilemma because both parties should optimize their situation by choosing peace and political power sharing, but they continue to renege on any negotiation and choose continuation of warfare for fear one party will end up with everything and they will be the party that ends up with nothing.<sup>15</sup>

To disrupt the vicious circle of the prisoner's dilemma, participants can create a mandatory punishment for disobeying the settlement. This penalty must be enforceable, automatic, and feared by both sides.<sup>16</sup> For instance, if one group were to be duplicitous during the disarmament process, the opposing group would obtain greater territory or more political representation in the government. Another option would be for a mediator to establish a monetary incentive that would be denied if the negotiated settlement was not followed. The parties could also create a contract with articles explicitly stating the consequences that will be incurred if either side flouts the agreed upon terms.

Possible resolutions will be developed for this project utilizing decision theory. "Decision theory is a collection of mathematical models and tools developed in the twentieth century, to assist people in choosing among alternative actions in complex situations."<sup>17</sup> Employing decision trees typical of the discipline of decision analysis, this paper will develop multiple scenarios for conflict resolution.<sup>18</sup> In *Game Theory and Strategy: Volume 36 of New Mathematical Library*, Phillip D. Straffin uses multiple

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<sup>14</sup> Phillip D. Straffin, *Game Theory and Strategy: Volume 36 of New Mathematical Library* (New York: Mathematical Association of America, 1993), 73.

<sup>15</sup> Barbara F. Walter, *Committing to Peace: The Successful Settlement of Civil Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 20.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Straffin, *Game Theory and Strategy*, 539.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

examples to describe decision analysis. Manufacturing problems, political decision analysis, and even David versus Goliath, are used illustratively. Straffin's models will be adapted to determine the most fitting solutions to the Syrian civil war.

Strategic moves are utilized in Chapter V to see if there is any means of achieving a more optimal outcome. "Strategic moves are designed to alter the beliefs and actions of others in a direction that is favorable to one side of a negotiation."<sup>19</sup> Modern day strategic moves have been applied in many different settings such as Stalin's "scorched earth" policy, corporate takeovers, and even nuclear deterrence.<sup>20</sup> The application of these moves is important to solving the Syrian civil war.

Following this determination, the Nash Arbitration Fair Point is identified during each phase of the civil war. This process is most useful for both parties in the context of a non-zero sum game. The goal of Nash Arbitration Fair Point is to find a fair solution that is at or above the status quo for both players.<sup>21</sup> Used in labor disputes to determine pay and benefits for a company's labor force, Nash Arbitration Fair Point has been used for obtaining the fairest results for both sides.

The minimum security levels that each side will accept will also be determined. While the security level is important to the government side, it is even more important to the opposition, who by definition is more vulnerable. The opposition is hypersensitive to the security issue because it has the most to lose during the transition from civil war to inclusion in the state. The opposition must give up territory, arms, and hard fought, precarious advantages in exchange for tentative government and military positions. A permanent solution must recognize the opposition's fear and create special circumstances during negotiations, to quell this nervousness.

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<sup>19</sup> Straffin, *Game Theory and Strategy*, 87.

<sup>20</sup> Dixit and Nalebuff, *Thinking Strategically*. 119.

<sup>21</sup> Straffin, *Game Theory and Strategy*, 102.

Next, the status quo point, the intersection of both players' security levels, must be identified.<sup>22</sup> According to Straffin, "the negotiation set are the points in the Pareto Optimal Set that are at or above the security level of both sides."<sup>23</sup> The Nash equilibrium will be found in the negotiation set.

## **B. CIVIL WAR RESOLUTION**

Pivotal in this is Fearon's notion that the bargaining model of war is underscored by the premise that there always exists an agreement that is preferable to war. Because fighting destroys resources, potential combatants are always better off settling a dispute short of war or moving to the peace process.<sup>24</sup> Since peace is preferable to war, then it would seem natural for the warring parties to settle the dispute, but this is not the case. Walter claims:

They fail because civil war opponents are asked to do what they consider unthinkable. At a time when no legitimate government and no legal institutions exist to enforce a contract, they are asked to demobilize, disarm, and disengage their military forces and prepare for peace. Once they lay down their weapons and begin to integrate their separate assets into a new united state, it becomes almost impossible to either enforce future cooperation or survive attack. In the end, negotiations fail because civil war adversaries cannot credibly promise to abide by such dangerous terms. Only when an outside enforcer steps in to guarantee the terms do commitments to disarm and share political power become believable. Only then does cooperation become possible.<sup>25</sup>

This issue impacts both sides, but it is most drastic for the vulnerable opposition force. The fear on both sides is intensified by a lack of information, as Fearon argues:

Information failures often occur prior to and during wars, due to asymmetric information problems in which parties have incentives to

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Straffin, *Game Theory and Strategy*, 103.

<sup>24</sup> James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (1995): 379–414, 382.

<sup>25</sup> Walter and Snyder, *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention*, 39.

misrepresent their capabilities or resolve. Because such incentives exist, parties cannot simply agree to share information.<sup>26</sup>

Todd Sandler summarizes Fearon's hypothesis of warfare by saying, "war is thus understood to stem from misunderstanding, misperceptions, incomplete information, or irrationality."<sup>27</sup> This lack of accumulated information is intensified on the side of the opposition in Syria because the opposition is a loose coalition of already potentially misinformed warring factions. The factions within the opposition can be fractured by the regime and may have their own agenda aside from others in the tentative coalition. While this can also occur within the regime, it is much less likely. Therefore, an even more convoluted than usual lack of information is an additional roadblock that further aggravates the fear of committing to peace.

The fracturing of the opposition can make peace easier or more difficult. In Driscoll's article on rebel fragmentation, the author believes that the regime can convert rebel groups to the government's side with promises of future benefits. The government will eventually win the conflict once it acquires enough factions from the opposition.<sup>28</sup> By converting the rebel groups, the government takes forces away from the opposition and simultaneously adds manpower to their military force. Additionally, this bypasses the commitment issue because the rebel commanders can still maintain control of their weapons and men. Rebel commanders can commit to peace and have the assurance that they will not be destroyed if the government does not carry out promises of future actions.<sup>29</sup>

Fracturing of the opposition can also make the peace process more difficult. Obtaining a negotiated settlement is tricky because not only are there two sides to the conflict, government versus the opposition, but the opposition has many positions within

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<sup>26</sup> Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," 391.

<sup>27</sup> Sandler, "Economic Analysis of Conflict," 726.

<sup>28</sup> Jesse Driscoll, "Commitment Problems or Bidding Wars? Rebel Fragmentation as Peace Building," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 1 (4 April 2012), <http://jcr.sagepub.com/content/56/1/118.full.pdf+html>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.



that entity. Obtaining universal consent from many parties makes an already difficult task even more arduous.<sup>30</sup>

Civil war resolution between two sides is complicated, but peace treaties between belligerents are made harder due to foreign intervention. Rachel Brandenburg believes the Syrian civil war is equally about external and internal actors.<sup>31</sup> The internal clash between the Assad Regime and the opposition is a fire fueled by external actors. Specifically, the conflict is a microcosm of the overall cold war for Middle East dominance between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Iran is attempting to maintain its influence in the Mediterranean through the surrogates of Syria and Hezbollah. If Iran loses the Syrian regime, then Hezbollah will be isolated and potentially destroyed. Saudi Arabia is in a “losses’ frame” because of losing Iraq to a Shia friendly regime. The Saudis want to regain their position in the Middle East cold war by establishing a Sunni dominated regime in Syria. This Syrian Sunni regime could also assist Iraqi Sunnis in regaining control of Iraq.

Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky’s “Prospect Theory” introduces the notion of losing and winning frames of reference or domains.<sup>32</sup> They state that actors perform differently depending on their reference point. Players tend to be more aggressive and take greater chances if they are in a losses’ frame of reference. If they are in a winning mindset then they are happier with the status quo. Saudi Arabia is currently in the “losses’ frame” after the “loss” of Iraq to the Iranian sphere. Saudi Arabia wants to break Iran’s sphere of influence in the Levant. Iran may also be in a “losses’ frame” with the potential overthrow of the Bashar Assad regime, meaning both sides are going to tend toward more aggressive stances. Iran has supported the Syrian government with military hardware, advisors, financing, and diplomatic support. If the administration is overthrown then they would lose all of their investment plus their land bridge to Lebanese Hezbollah.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Rachel Brandenburg, “Neighborhood Watch: Why Regional Players Will be Indispensable to Achieving Peace in Syria,” Peace-Game, [http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/files/Neighborhood%20Watch-Rachel%20Brandenburg\(1\).pdf](http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/files/Neighborhood%20Watch-Rachel%20Brandenburg(1).pdf).

<sup>32</sup> Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, “Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk,” *Econometrica* 47, no. 2 (March 1979): 263–291.

With an understanding of the psychology of civil wars and third-party support established, methods of settling a civil war conflict must now be examined. Walter suggests,

Both sides can create early warning systems and sophisticated monitoring and verification procedures to check each other's behavior. Both sides can build military defenses, forge external alliances, and set up buffer zones to make aggression more costly. They can also use symbiotic trade relationships, side-payments, and economic coercion to make the rewards from cooperation even more enticing. They can also withhold key resources or use reciprocal punishment strategies to ensure that violations are punished. Each of these strategies helps to enforce order and create binding agreements.<sup>33</sup>

These methods can allow both sides to overcome the problem of credible commitment and the prisoner's dilemma.

Either side can also employ the "tit-for-tat" strategy.<sup>34</sup> This idea was developed by Robert Axelrod in 1984 and has been used in numerous situations as a negotiation strategy that can be used to assist in resolving the Syrian civil war. Axelrod argues "tit-for-tat embodies four principles that should be evident in any effective strategy: clarity, niceness, revocability, and forgiveness."<sup>35</sup> Both sides are provided a mechanism for cooperation that allows everyone to get past the credible commitment issues in this approach. Once an agreed upon step has been followed, the other side's actions can be viewed. If one side decides not to cooperate, the other side is in a safe position to protect itself and can respond in kind. Walter's interpretation of this approach states "the tit-for-tat theory allows negotiations and demobilization to be broken down into small incremental steps to allow both sides to act and view the reaction without one side obtaining a debilitating one-step advantage. Rebels and governments can demobilize simultaneously. Rebels could allow the government to expand its control over rebel

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<sup>33</sup> Walter, *Committing to Peace*, 7–11.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Axelrod, *The Complexity of Cooperation: Agent-based Models of Competition and Collaboration* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>35</sup> Dixit and Nalebuff, *Thinking Strategically*, 106.

controlled territory incrementally in exchange for a series of political, military, or agrarian reform.<sup>36</sup>

Partitioning Syria is also a possible solution to the Syrian civil war. The land could be divided into three parts: Kurdish territory, Sunni territory, and Alawite/Christian territory. Some experts do not think this is a feasible idea, but others believe it has merit. In general, Fred Ikle argues that

if partition is not a feasible outcome because the belligerents are not geographically separable, one side has to get all, or nearly so, since there cannot be two governments ruling over one country, and since the passions aroused and the political cleavages opened render a sharing of power unworkable.<sup>37</sup>

Partition of Syria may be the only possible solution to this civil war.

Some political scientists believe mutually painful stalemates lead to peaceful resolutions, but Michael G. Findley believes these agreements rarely last.<sup>38</sup> The Syrian civil war is at or close to being a stalemate that negatively impacts both sides. This deadlock could indicate that no one side can win in the short term and leaves open substantial ambiguity about the relative distribution of power. When an impasse occurs, there may be no concluded settlement. Findley believes “such conditions may lead to ‘inherently risky’ peace agreements and leave open possible future fighting that could allow the war to end on different terms.”<sup>39</sup>

Findley’s argument about the information-inhibiting role of stalemates is consistent with what some have said about interstate wars: stalemates can leave parties unsatisfied and more likely to challenge the stalemated outcome in the future.

When stalemates occur, information asymmetries may be high and little precise information is revealed to combatants, but negotiations can reveal information. Thus, a stalemate might encourage the initiation of

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<sup>36</sup> Walter, *Committing to Peace*.

<sup>37</sup> Barbara F. Walter, “Critical Barriers to Civil War Resolution,” *International Organization* 51, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 14.

<sup>38</sup> Michael G. Findley, “Bargaining and the Interdependent Stages of Civil War Resolution,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 57, no. 905 (August 2013).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 913.

negotiations that allow more information to be revealed to combatants. If negotiations do not fully resolve information deficiencies, which may be likely given such high uncertainty, then reaching or implementing an agreement may be difficult, despite experiencing a stalemate. Parties recognize that reaching or implementing an agreement could solidify a new status quo, making any future challenges to the agreement much more difficult. Thus, parties will want to be sure that they have fully resolved information problems and attained what they expect based on their capabilities before reaching or implementing a new agreement. Paradoxically, then, stalemates might force parties to cooperate in the short term, but they may not be conducive to a long-term resolution of the war. Indeed, stalemates might simply create more of an incentive to derail a peace agreement because information problems were not fully resolved or because stalemates create disincentives for long-term cooperation.<sup>40</sup>

Social scientists such as Colin P. Clarke and Christopher Paul have written on the subject of “hurting stalemates” in the belief that painful stalemates lead to successful negotiations for peacefully ending a conflict. They have developed a seven-phase model for negotiating settlements that begins with a situation in which both sides have entered into a mutually destructive military stalemate: both sides becoming recognized as legitimate negotiating partners; brokered cease fire; official intermediate agreement brokered by external actors; power sharing within the country; moderation of insurgent leaders to legitimate political actors; and third-party guarantor. The third party acts as a non-biased actor capable of maintaining peace between both sides of the conflict.<sup>41</sup> The Syrian civil war is in the realm of the first two steps. This thesis will primarily focus on step five, which focuses on negotiations over power sharing within the state. The gamble for greater power was the impetus for the civil war; therefore, negotiating over power within the new state is the most important step within the process.

Most political scientists believe that the largest difficulty to civil war conflict resolution is overcoming the credible commitment problem. “Strong security guarantees can help solve commitment problems, especially if third parties agree to enforce an

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 911.

<sup>41</sup> Colin P. Clarke and Christopher Paul, *From Stalemate to Settlement: Lessons for Afghanistan from Historical Insurgencies that Have Been Resolved through Negotiations* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2014), [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR469.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR469.html).

agreement that belligerents prefer to continue war.”<sup>42</sup> The third-party force must be non-biased and respected by both sides. This idea of a non-biased third-party force has successfully allowed numerous warring factions to overcome the prisoner’s dilemma.

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<sup>42</sup> Findley, “Bargaining,” 908.

### **III. AN INTERNATIONAL STRUGGLE**

“Syria is the cockpit of the Middle East, and a struggle for control of Syria would be ignited.”

–Joshua Landis, Syrian Expert

“The friend of my enemy is my enemy.”

–Old Arab proverb

The conflict in Syria is a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which is being fought by the Syrian regime and the opposition force. This chapter will analyze the external actors on both sides to view their role in the conflict. It will also hypothesize the effects of the outcome on the external actors.

The two sides are led by regional powers, but other international supporters contribute to the violence in Syria. The United States, Turkey, Qatar, and other Arabic peninsula states support the Saudi Arabian coalition. The Iranian coalition represents Russia and Lebanese Hezbollah. All sponsor states are influential within Syria, but the most important players in the conflict are Saudi Arabia and Iran. Both states are veto players, and both states must be satisfied with the negotiated settlement in order to achieve peace in the war torn country.

#### **A. PRO-ASSAD**

##### **1. Iran**

Tehran has had an unusually strong relationship with Damascus since the early 1980s, perhaps attributable to the cultural similarities they share. Syria’s Alawite religion is comparable to the Islam of Iran’s Shia.<sup>43</sup> Alawites are a minority in Syria, and Shia are minorities in the Middle East. This religious tie is understandable if the reader views the Middle East through only a sectarian lens, but the relationship goes beyond religious

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<sup>43</sup> The Shia population is the majority in Iran and Iraq. It is suspected that the Shia population is the majority in Bahrain, but the government of Bahrain has not conducted a recently census.

compatibility. The ties between Damascus and Tehran have remained durable throughout the decades because of strategic necessities for both countries.

This affiliation began the post-Iranian revolution. This upheaval was an Islamic revolution, and Iran's leaders wanted to spread the Islamic revolution beyond its borders. The connection was further strengthened during the Iran-Iraq war. Syria was the only Arab state to support Iran in the struggle.<sup>44</sup> During the post-war years, the interactions between the two countries continued to flourish because of Syria's strategic location, economics, and Iran's desire to enhance its influence in the region. These factors have created a tight bond between the countries.

Syria has occupied a geostrategic location for thousands of years. It is the crossroads between Europe and the Middle East and it overlooks the Mediterranean. Additionally, Syria's southern edge dips into Lebanon and Palestine. Syria's prime position in the Levant is extremely important to Iran, because Syria gives Iran strategic depth.<sup>45</sup> Through Syria, Iran can influence a large portion of the Middle East via proxy forces. Iran's two main action arms within the region are Hamas and Hezbollah. Iran's support for Hamas against Israel, gives Iran greater stature within the Middle East. Iran can also use Hamas to put military pressure on Israel, as the world saw when Hamas launched rockets into Israel in 2014. Iran has the ability to use Hezbollah in the same capacity. Hezbollah has been used as an indirect means of striking Israel. Both Hezbollah and Iran gained creditability during the Israeli-Hezbollah war in 2006 where Hezbollah fought Israel to a standstill. Without at least a portion of Syria, Iran's ability to influence the region would be greatly reduced.

Another tie between the countries is economics. David Lesch explains that "economic dimensions developed over time such as investment opportunities, tourism, and trade between the two countries, particularly cheap Iranian oil. The trade relations are particularly one sided with Syria reaping the most benefits."<sup>46</sup> Syria directly gains

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<sup>44</sup> David W. Lesch, *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 126.

economically from the relationship and Iran gains access to additional markets in the Levant. The additional economic tie has reinforced the overall relationship between the two countries.

Since America's invasion of Iraq in 2003, the relationship has deepened. The presence of thousands of U.S. troops along the border of both Syria and Iran coupled with President Bush's threats of regime change heightened fears in both countries. Additionally, Israel's threat of bombing Iran's nuclear reactor provoked Iran into unleashing Hamas and Hezbollah on Israel. These two proxy forces are an asymmetrical reaction to any threat of attack from Israel. These dangers have driven both countries into a tighter alliance to ensure their mutual survival.

Iran has remained loyal to Assad since the beginning of the Syrian uprising. "Iran has sent elements of its Revolutionary Guards (Qods Force) along with elements of Hezbollah to train Syrian forces and serve in direct combat rolls."<sup>47</sup> Iran's stature within the Arab world immediately decreased due to its hypocrisy. It firmly supported Arab spring protestors in Tunisia and Egypt, yet it remained with Assad after his bloody crackdown on protestors demanding political rights. This two-faced image has negatively impacted Iran's reputation, but Iran continues to support Syria due to strategic necessities. Iran has maintained its relationship with Bashar Al-Assad, and will only negotiate if it can maintain at least a portion of Syria.

## **2. Russia**

Russia has also had a long relationship with Syria. This affiliation was formalized during the Cold War in 1980, when Hafiz Al-Assad signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union.<sup>48</sup> Throughout the recent decades, Russia has become economically, diplomatically, and militarily intertwined with Damascus. Russia would suffer a strategic loss if Assad was ousted. Therefore, Russia has been a close ally of Assad and continues to support him despite widespread criticism.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 136.



Russia's economic interests in Syria extend far beyond the military sphere, with a total value of approximately \$20 billion. Russian companies have made extensive investments in oil and gas exploration and production in Syria.<sup>49</sup>

The largest Russian energy corporations to invest in Syria are Tatneft, Stroitransgaz, Gazprom, Uralmash, and Rosatom.<sup>50</sup>

Other Syrian sectors that have received Russian investment are tourism, manufacturing, and infrastructure projects. Russian companies have numerous business interests in Syria, including selling Syria passenger planes, developing joint ventures to build agriculture equipment, building a hotel complex in Latakia, building wireless networks in Syria, and developing plans to install GLONASS-based navigation equipment in Syrian vehicles.<sup>51</sup>

Russia and Syria are also connected through military sales, military training, and military basing. "Syria provides an important outlet for weapon sales: the total amount of sales over the previous decade was about \$1.5 billion, making it Russia's seventh-largest buyer."<sup>52</sup> According to a news article in 2012, however, Syria may be a significant arms buyer but it is slow to pay for its purchases. "Reportedly, Damascus has paid for less than half of the arms it has contracted from Russia, and is unlikely to be able to afford to make the payments due to meet existing contracts."<sup>53</sup> Even though Russia is heavily criticized, Russia continues to supply the Assad system not only with arms but other forms of military support. Andrej Kreutz estimates "that by 2006, approximately 10,000 Syrian officers had received training at both Soviet and Russian military academies, and approximately 2,000 Russian military advisers were serving in the Syrian military."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Dmitry Gorenburg, "Why Russia Supports Repressive Regimes in Syria and the Middle East," Policy Memo #198, PONARS EURASIA, June 2012, <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/why-russia-supports-repressive-regimes-syria-and-middle-east>.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>52</sup> Lesch, *Syria*, 136.

<sup>53</sup> Howard Gethin and Alexander Stelliferovsky, "Russia Picks Politics over Syria Arms Exports," Sputniknews.com, 10 July 2012, <http://www.sputniknews.com/analysis/20120710/174530767.html>.

<sup>54</sup> Andrej Kreutz, "Syria: Russia's Best Asset in the Middle East," *Russie.Nei.Visions*, no. 55 (November 2010): 18.

This number is assuredly higher now than in 2006. Furthermore, the Russian naval base in Tartus is a small but strategically key base along the Mediterranean. The base provides logistical support to the Russian navy and allows Russia greater influence in Syria and beyond.

Russia provides material support and military guidance in addition to serving as a diplomatic shield to Syria, but this continued support of Assad has left it isolated internationally. Roy Allison believes that Russia is worried the West will attempt a direct military intervention similar to the one that occurred in Libya removing a head of state that was aligned with Russia.<sup>55</sup> Syria is essential to Russia's geostrategic ambitions. Syria and Iran are Russia's only allies in the Middle East. If Syria falls to the opposition then this weakens both Russia and Iran. Russia would lose its ability to project power in the Mediterranean and Levant if their only steadfast Cold War ally fell; therefore, they have worked to ensure that Western leaders cannot directly intervene in Syria to affect regime change.

In sum, Syria is vitally important to Russia because of its economic ties, military relations, weapons sales, strategic location, and as a site to project Russian influence throughout the Middle East, but Syria is mostly important to Russia because of its necessity to its key ally, Iran. Russia must continue to support Assad because of economic, geostrategic, and military ties, but the overwhelming driver is to prevent Iran from losing a key supporter in the region.

### **3. Hezbollah**

Lebanon is pivotal to Syria. Syria has made Lebanon a main part of its foreign policy. Both Assad regimes have emphasized a need to control Lebanon in order to prevent an anti-Syria organization from coming into power. Lebanon's position on Syria's southern flank makes Damascus's need to control Lebanon essential.<sup>56</sup> In 2005, a large explosion in Beirut assassinated the Prime Minister of Lebanon, Rafic Hariri. Most

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<sup>55</sup> Roy Allison, "Russia and Syria: Explaining Alignment with a Regime in Crisis," *International Affairs* 89, no. 4 (May 2012): 795–823.

<sup>56</sup> Lesch, *Syria*, 130.

people held the Syrian government responsible, but Syria was not officially condemned. Because of this assassination, the Syrian army was removed from Lebanon. This action made the link between Hezbollah and Syria stronger. Assad needs Hezbollah to fill a political vacuum resulting from the Syrian army's departure in 2005. Syria has to use Hezbollah as an indirect force in Lebanon to influence events within the country.

The Israel-Hezbollah war in 2006, further increased Hezbollah's reputation throughout the Middle East.<sup>57</sup> Hezbollah's legitimacy grew within Lebanon and throughout the Middle East. The group's members were viewed as freedom fighters protecting Lebanon from Israel. Assad took this opportunity to increase his personal status within the Middle East by becoming more closely tied to Hezbollah.

Why would Hezbollah risk its reputation as a Lebanese liberation movement to become a sectarian hit squad for Assad? Lebanese Hezbollah has a critical symbiotic relationship with Assad. Hezbollah needs Damascus because it serves as a vital supply point from Tehran. The Syrian government also provides diplomatic protection and international legitimacy. For its part, Hezbollah serves as an indirect means of influencing events in Lebanon and inflicting punishment on Israel when Syria cannot strike directly.

Hezbollah's commitment to Assad is realpolitik. Hezbollah requires a friendly government in Damascus. In order to save that link, Hezbollah has had to sacrifice its reputation. Recently, Hezbollah has served as military advisors to the Syrian army, and the organization has also provided direct support in locations such as Qusayr.<sup>58</sup> Hezbollah and Assad's goals are not identical, but both sides need each other for future survival.

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<sup>57</sup> Rodger Shanahan, "A Pyrrhic Victory? Hezbollah's Complex Post-War Environment," *Democracy and Security* 4, no. 1 (2008):34-37.

<sup>58</sup> "Syrian Army Regains Strategic City of Qusayr," Al Jazeera, 6 June 2013.

## **B. ANTI-ASSAD**

### **1. Saudi Arabia**

Since the Islamic revolution in 1979, Riyadh has had a rocky relationship with Syria when Hafez Al-Assad became involved in a strategic partnership with Iran. Saudi Arabia views the Syrian relationship with Iran as a threat to its interests in the Levant and throughout the Middle East. Additionally, Riyadh's religious perspective regards the Alawite group in Syria as a Shia sect that links them closely to Iran.<sup>59</sup>

The Saudi-Syrian relationship hit a new low after the Hariri assassination in Lebanon. Hariri was close to Saudi Arabia, and the assassination of its 'representative' in Lebanon stung. This assassination reduced the Saudi influence in Lebanon, which has been considered Syria's zone of influence. Syria has also blocked Saudi ambitions in Palestine and Iraq.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, Saudi Arabia was not fond of the rise of Hezbollah, an Iranian connected group, in Lebanon. Hezbollah's enhanced image during the post-2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War was an affront to Saudi interests in the region.

The coming of the Arab Spring further exasperated Riyadh. Two regimes in the Saudi sphere of influence, Tunisia and Egypt, crumbled during this period. Combined with the loss of Iraq and growing Iranian influence in Bahrain, Lebanon, and Palestine, the situation became more unbearable.

The tinderbox of Syria's political landscape was irresistible to a desperate Saudi kingdom. On 8 August 2011, King Abdullah became the first Arab head of state openly to condemn the Syrian government's actions when he warned Assad that Syria would be pulled down into the depths of turmoil and loss if it did not enact serious reform.<sup>61</sup> Saudi Arabia views the conflict as a chance to oust Assad, altering the balance in the Middle East between Tehran and Riyadh. In a domino effect, if Assad falls then Hezbollah and Hamas either fall or they are weakened. The loss of the Iranian bridge into the Levant,

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<sup>59</sup> "Saudi Arabia Changes Course on Syria," *Jane's Intelligence Weekly*, 12 August 2011.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Lesch, *Syria*, 146.

coupled with a Sunni dominated government in Syria, would be a huge benefit to Saudi Arabia in the Middle East cold war.

## **2. The United States**

Since the mid-1950s, the United States has had a fluctuating dynamic with Syria. The relationship was severed after the failed 1957 Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) supported coup of the Syrian president.<sup>62</sup> The association between the two countries was again cut in 1967 after the Six Day War. The connection warmed until 1980 when Hafez Al-Assad signed a treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union.<sup>63</sup> The relationship between Syria and the United States remained frozen in the cold war paradigm until the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989. The 1990s brought a thawing in the relationship between the adversaries. During Operation Desert Storm in 1991, Syria cooperated with the U.S.-led coalition force that defeated Saddam. In the following years, the United States cooperated with Syria on the Lebanese peace agreement and peace negotiations for better relations with Israel.<sup>64</sup>

The affiliation began to change during the Bush administration. Following the attack on 11 September 2001, Syria provided intelligence to the United States on Al Qaeda members in the Middle East. This was a natural union, because both countries were opposed to Sunni extremist organizations. Then the situation changed between the two countries. Syria's opposition to the Iraq war created tension between Damascus and Washington. The neoconservatives in Washington dominated the policy of the Bush administration, and there was talk around Washington about leadership change in Damascus and Tehran. Tensions began to ease in the later part of the Bush administration, when it became apparent that the United States would not directly attempt to overthrow the regime in Damascus.

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<sup>62</sup> Curtis Adams, "The Baby and the Baath Water," BBC, 16 June 2011, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/adamcurtis/posts/the\\_baby\\_and\\_the\\_baath\\_water](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/adamcurtis/posts/the_baby_and_the_baath_water).

<sup>63</sup> Lesch, *Syria*, 136.

<sup>64</sup> American Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, "Israel-Syria Negotiations," Jewish Virtual Library, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Peace/israelsyr.html>.

The thaw in the bilateral relationship came after the inauguration of President Barack Obama. He wanted to diffuse the tension between the nations. From 2008 to 2011, there seemed to be a developing bond of trust between the West and Damascus. Even in March 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, “There’s a different leader in Syria now. Many of the members of Congress of both parties who have gone to Syria in recent months have said they believe Assad is a reformer.”<sup>65</sup> A change in the relationship came later in 2011, when the heavy handed crackdowns on demonstrations continued. The United States is now opposed to the Assad regime and firmly in the Saudi coalition.

The optimal solution for the United States is a negotiated peace in Syria without Assad and without extremists within the government.<sup>66</sup> The United States would settle for a weakened Assad remaining in power, especially if it prevented extremists from gaining control of the government. It comes down to understanding that a known quantity, Assad, is better than an unknown quantity.

### **3. Jordan**

Jordanian-Syrian dealings have been tense since the French occupation period (1920–1948). The support of Prince Abdullah bin Al-Hussein to the Syrian armed rebellions created tension in the years 1936, 1939, and 1945. Prince Abdullah had supported the rebellions during the period of the French occupation. Interactions had improved significantly in the 1970s during the rule of King Hussein. A few years later, there were disagreements between King Hussein and Syrian leaders. In 1977, Syria accused Jordan of directly supporting the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Syria. Jordan rejected these claims.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Dina Hughes, “As Syria Conflict Rages on, Clinton’s Rhetoric Intensifies,” ABC News, 13 June 2012, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/syria-conflict-rages-clintons-rhetoric-intensifies/story?id=16561069>.

<sup>66</sup> Radha Iyengar and Brian Fishman, *The Conflict in Syria: An Assessment in U.S. Strategic Interests* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, March 2013), [http://newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/Fishman\\_Iyengar\\_Syria\\_NAF.pdf](http://newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/Fishman_Iyengar_Syria_NAF.pdf).

<sup>67</sup> Mohammed Mnassir, “Page from the History of Jordan,” Ammon News, 26 February 2010, [www.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articulo=55309](http://www.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articulo=55309).

Affairs worsened during the Iran-Iraq war when Jordan supported Iraq, while Syria declared its support for Iran. On 20 November 1980, Syria mobilized troops on the border of Jordan consisting of three divisions and 1,100 tanks. The Syrian media also launched a propaganda campaign against Jordan on charges that Jordan supported the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and was attempting to create political tension within Syria. Jordan reacted to Syria and mobilized its forces along the Syrian border. The tension eased only after the defeat of the Muslim Brotherhood rebellion in Hama in February 1982, and Syria officially withdrew its army from the border after the rebellion ended on December 1982.<sup>68</sup> This hostility continued throughout the 1980s. A thaw in relations began after the Gulf War. This period of normality continued during the reign of King Hussein and King Abdullah II.<sup>69</sup>

The dealings between the two countries began to sour during the start of the Syrian revolution. This change in relationship occurred in 2011 after the fall of the Tunisian and Egyptian governments when the winds of political uprising brought the revolution to Syria. Initially, the Jordanian government wanted to maintain the status quo in Damascus because the country was already suffering from the turmoil in Iraq; the Hashemite King was busy dealing with internal criticisms of mismanagement and corruption, and Jordan was afraid of the Jihad activity spillover from the potential conflict in Syria.<sup>70</sup> This was exacerbated following the Syrian security forces' torturing of young boys in the border town of Deraa.<sup>71</sup>

Jordan became a supply point for Gulf States seeking to arm the opposition movement in Syria. Jordan has begrudgingly become involved in the conflict as a proxy for its wealthy southern neighbor, since the Jordanian economy depends greatly on investment from the Gulf.<sup>72</sup> Additionally, the Kingdom of Jordan receives political cover

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<sup>68</sup>Laurie A. Brand, *Jordan's Inter-Arab Relation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 152–195.

<sup>69</sup> Umar F. Abd-Allah, *The Islamic Struggle in Syria* (Berkeley, CA: Mizan Press, 1983), 88–108.

<sup>70</sup> Emile Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant* (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2013), 139.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

from Riyadh as it deals with political dissension within its own borders.<sup>73</sup> In return for these services, Amman must assist in bringing down the house of Assad even though a civil war in Syria will hurt the Jordanian economy and create greater political tension.

Jordan's resources have been strained from the fallout of the Syrian revolution. The continued conflict has exacerbated problems in the areas of politics, security, and economics. The conflict also created refugee problems. According to official estimates, there are more than 1.3 million refugees residing in Jordan as of May 2014, making up about 15 percent of the country's total population. Jordan is facing difficult economic conditions, including official unemployment rates of about 12 percent. This issue will pose long-term demographic and political problems for the country. After the war in Iraq, which began in 2003, the vast majority of Iraqis fled to Jordan from their homeland, where they remain. Similarly, it seems likely that these Syrians will continue to remain in Jordan.<sup>74</sup>

The rise of extremists in Syria has become a strong concern for Jordan. This concern has grown because of the presence of new radical extremist groups on the border of Jordan, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Jabhat al-Nusra (JN). These groups pose a serious threat to Jordan's security. Jordan continues to confront the rise of the Salafist movement within its own territory, while many of the more extreme elements in the country are currently fighting in Syria. Therefore, the return of any of these extremists would pose additional challenges for the country, as the returning fighters will increase the radicalism of the Salafist movement in Jordan.

Jordan seems stuck between a rock and a hard place. Neither a win by the Syrian regime, nor a win by the extremist elements of the opposition movement, bode well for the kingdom. Jordan cannot afford any scenario in which the regime defeats the opposition, because the Assad regime will take a strong position against Jordan. Syria and its allies will become more hostile towards Jordan. The strategic relationship between Jordan and Saudi Arabia and the West, as well as differences with the Syrian regime,

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>74</sup> Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant*, 138–142.



makes reconciliation with the Syrian regime nearly impossible. Indeed, the Syrian regime has publicly accused Jordan of training opposition forces in its territory.<sup>75</sup>

The Jordanian government must stick to its alignment with Riyadh, and the country must continue to serve as a logistical, training, and intelligence hub. Jordan can best be served with a quick end to the Syrian civil war through a political compromise. This would alleviate economic and political stresses on the kingdom. Unfortunately, the civil war in Syria will continue at varying levels of violence for many years.

#### **4. Turkey**

The Syrian-Turkish relationship has ebbed and flowed for decades. Prior to the reign of Bashar al-Assad, the relationship was hostile due to water sharing of the Euphrates, the Hatay/Alexandretta territory dispute, Syrian support for Kurdish separatist groups in Turkey, Turkey's Western leanings opposed to Syria's Russian ties, strong Turkish-Israeli ties that began to develop in the 1980s, and historical antagonisms going back to the days when Syria was a part of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>76</sup>

During Bashar's leadership of Syria, the relationship between Turkey and Syria became much warmer. This relationship further developed after Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan took office in 2003. Under his 'good neighbor' policy, the relationship between Syria and Turkey flourished. Both countries economically benefited from a thaw in relations, especially in the sectors of tourism and trade.<sup>77</sup>

Unexpectedly, the rapport between the two nations slowly began to unravel. The unrest in the region surprisingly came to Syria in 2011. The regime quickly met this protest with violence to quell the uprisings. The international observers were shocked at the bloody actions of the army and the Syrian security apparatus. The violence and lack of political reform in Syria prevented Erdogan from continuing his support of Bashar al-Assad when the regime was decimating a mostly Sunni opposition movement. Assad put

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<sup>75</sup> "Jordan Aid to Opposition Forces Raises Tensions with Syria," Today's Zaman, <http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail.action;jsessionid=PqjksVUMJEQ2oN2E-rzq4KV+?newsId=311734&columnistId=0>.

<sup>76</sup> Lesch, *Syria*, 140.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

the Turkish government in a corner where it could not continue to support an authoritarian leader, especially when that leader was conducting sectarian killings of Sunnis, a sect who compose a majority of the Turkish population.

This change in Ankara was surprising since so much was riding on relations with Damascus. If Erdogan turned against Assad, then he would immediately lose economic benefits accrued during the previous decade. Additionally, Turkey would hurt relationships with Baghdad and Tehran. If Erdogan had so much to lose by opposing Assad, why did he eventually speak out against the killings and join the Saudi side in opposition to Assad? The answer is 'Soft Power.' As Mark Haas has said:

The key reason for this shift was the realization that non-ideological foreign policies were hurting Turkey's interests by squandering its large reserve of soft power throughout the Islamic world. Turkey is extremely popular because of its commitment to democracy and Islamic identity. Not supporting popular protests would have been a major blow to this popularity by demonstrating Turkey's hypocrisy and selfishness.<sup>78</sup>

The killing of the protestors pushed Turkey to act even though doing so was against Turkey's commercial interests.

Turkey and Erdogan began to increase pressure on Assad to make political reforms or remove himself from office. After Assad refused to make meaningful political reforms, Ankara began turning up the diplomatic pressure by calling for his removal. Turkey cut diplomatic ties with Syria and took active steps to assist the opposition.<sup>79</sup> Turkey has served as a training area for opposition forces, and has served as a logistical point for weapons and supplies entering Syria. Additionally, Turkey has hosted Syrian opposition political parties and has rallied international condemnation of Assad's tactics.

## **5. Qatar**

Qatar's relationship with Syria is similar to Turkey's relationship with Damascus. Under Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian relationship with Qatar flourished throughout the 2000s. Qatar even brokered a Lebanese power-sharing agreement, the Doha Agreement.

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<sup>78</sup> Lesch, *Syria*, 144.

<sup>79</sup> Lesch, *Syria*, 144.

Qatar chose to get involved in the Syrian revolution to both stem the growing Iranian influence in the region, and to protect its soft power from criticisms of hypocrisy.<sup>80</sup> The regime in Doha did not want to be tied to Assad, who was not allowing necessary political reform and who was slaughtering his own Sunni citizens. Additionally, the Qataris wanted to use the Syrian civil war as a catalyst to further their influence throughout the region and prove they are a regional player.

Doha has contributed greatly to the rebel cause. The Qatari government has supported the opposition with funding, media coverage, and diplomatic assistance.<sup>81</sup> Additionally, Qatar has armed the opposition with small and light weaponry through intermediaries in Turkey and Jordan.<sup>82</sup> Funding from private donors within the country has also provided support to opposition fighters in Syria. These contributions have come under some criticism from Westerners, and even governments within the region, for supporting extremist groups in Syria, such as JN and ISIS. Qatar will continue to use the Syrian revolution as a platform to expand its influence throughout the region.

Qatar's move to become involved in the Syrian civil war has illuminated some fractures between Riyadh and Doha. Both nations and the non-state actors within those nations have created a fragmentation of the opposition movement because each group sought a proxy force in the country to further their interest in the region.

For example, the Islamic Front was largely supported by Saudi non-state actors, while the Muslim Brotherhood, which constituted a significant proportion of the membership of the Syrian National Coalition (SNC), was backed by Qatar. Syrian rivalry regarding how the opposition should act resulted in a lack of cooperation between different opposition groups—and even within them—as witnessed in the run up to the Geneva II conference in February 2014, when Qatari-backed members of the SNC withdrew from the Saudi-backed Syrian Coalition. The fragmentation of

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>81</sup> Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant*, 121.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

the Syrian opposition played into the hands of Bashar al-Assad in his bid to quell the uprising against him.<sup>83</sup>

Obviously, there are differences of opinion between the coalition members, but they are all on the side of the opposition. The most influential member in the coalition is Saudi Arabia. Its influence allows Riyadh to dictate the overall policy of the coalition of opposition supporters.

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<sup>83</sup> Lina Khatib and Ellen Lust, "The Transformation of Arab Activism: New Contexts, Domestic Institutions, and Regional Rivalry," Project on Middle East Democracy, 4, <http://pomed.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Policy-Brief-Khatib-Lust-May-2014.pdf>.

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#### **IV. ALTERNATIVE BATTLEFIELDS: YEMEN, BAHRAIN, AND KUWAIT**

Syria is not the sole battleground in the Middle East cold war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The other notable conflict points are Bahrain, Kuwait, and Yemen, which are locations with a large Shiite population that is typically underrepresented in government. All of these places are friction points between these regional powers struggling for Middle East supremacy. This chapter briefly discusses the contest for regional influence in these less analyzed conflict zones. These areas could serve as potential bargaining chips in the regional grand bargain to settle the conflict in Syria.

##### **A. YEMEN**

Since 2004, the central government in Yemen has been in a struggle with the Houthis. The government in Sana'a is closely tied to Saudi Arabia, and the Houthis are a group that scares the Saudi government. The government in Sana'a has accused the Iranians of supporting the Houthi movement in Yemen. These accusations have increased since the recent Houthi offensive that seized key strategic locations in the capital.<sup>84</sup> The Houthis seem to be a likely candidate for an Iranian proxy force in Yemen. The group consists of Zaidi Shi'ites who shares the same religion as Iran. Additionally, Yemen is on the Arabian Peninsula close to Iran's biggest rival, which puts the Houthis in a prime location to disrupt and distract the Saudi Kingdom.

Some regional experts have questioned the claims of the Yemeni government that the Houthi movement is tied to Iran; however, there are indications of Iranian involvement in Yemen. Sana'a has Iranian sailors and members of the Iranian revolutionary guard in its prisons. The government recently released two people from jail who were suspected of being Hezbollah military experts. They were held for two years after being detained in the capital following a visit to the Houthi-controlled area.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Saeed Al-Batati, "Iran Supported al Houthis Sana'a Takeover-Intelligence Chief," *Gulf News*, 29 September 2014, <http://gulfnews.com/news/region/iran/iran-supported-al-houthis-sana-a-takeover-intelligence-chief-1.1391880>.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

Weapon cargos have been seized from ships in Yemeni ports tied to Tehran. In 2012, the *New York Times* reported that a senior American official said, “Iranian smugglers, backed by the Quds force, are using small boats to ship AK-47s, rocket propelled grenades, and other arms to equip the rebels.”<sup>86</sup> Additionally, Iran has added a daily Yemeni television program to its Arabic language channel, and the Iranians even invited people from the anti-government movement in Yemen to come to Iran for a conference.<sup>87</sup>

Even though we can assume that Iran directly supports the Houthis, there has never been concrete evidence to support this claim. Regardless of Iranian support for the Houthi insurgency in Yemen, the conflict benefits Tehran. The running conflict, at a minimum, draws Riyadh’s attention away from other areas to deal with the uprising on its southern border. In a more detrimental case, it is a drain on the Saudi government to allocate Saudi military resources and time to the conflict. If the Houthi can seize Sana’a, Iran could potentially have a friendly government on the Arabian Peninsula.

## **B.     BAHRAIN**

Bahrain is strategically located between the Arabian Peninsula and Iran. Its population reflects its location and is a mixture of numerous faiths. The most dominant feature of this island nation is that the minority Sunni population is the ruling class and the Shia community has a limited role in governance. This combustible political situation has led to protests and violence. This mixture has also led to a natural inlet for Iranian influence. Iran has been accused of directly and indirectly supporting the Shiite movement in Bahrain to further its own interests in the region.

When Khomeini came to power in 1980, Iran was looking to export the Iranian revolution throughout the region. Iran found a prime location in Bahrain, and a willing proxy organization called the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain (IFLB). The IFLB took direction from Tehran, and some members trained with the Iranian

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<sup>86</sup> Eric Schmitt and Robert F. Worth, “Aiding Yemen Rebels, Iran Seeks Wider Mideast Role,” *New York Times*, 15 March 2012, sec. Middle East.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

Revolutionary Guards Corp (IRGC).<sup>88</sup> In 1981, many leaders of the IFLB were arrested on charges of planning a coup against the government. This effectively ended the organization, but the seeds of the grievances remained.

The lack of economic opportunity and disenfranchisement continued to build throughout the decades and culminated in 2011, during the wave of turbulence from the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring brought protests to Bahrain and these protests triggered heavy-handed security force crackdowns. This response provoked further demonstrations and social protests resulting in the deaths of numerous Bahraini citizens.<sup>89</sup> These protests were not sparked by Iran but the flames were surely stoked by Tehran championing the Arab Spring prior to its arrival in Damascus.

Many analysts blame the roots of the political disturbances in Bahrain on the Saudi-backed monarch and the lack of political inclusion of Shi'ites; however, Bahrain officials say that meaningful reform would usher in Iranian dominance of the country.<sup>90</sup> Regardless, Iran has stepped into a political void to assist Shi'ite Bahrainis in an attempt to further their own goals in the region. Bahrain will surely be a continuous battleground for the coming years in the overarching cold war.

### **C. KUWAIT**

The struggle over Middle Eastern supremacy has also occurred in another country that is located between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Kuwait is a majority Sunni population with a large Shi'ite population (approximately 15 percent).<sup>91</sup> The Sunni majority dominates government and Kuwaiti foreign policy favors Saudi Arabia. Currently, the Shi'ite minority in Kuwait has a high standard of living and is relatively well represented in parliament, but Iran has continuously attempted to use its soft power and indirect military operations to bring Kuwaiti Shi'ites into its sphere of influence.

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<sup>88</sup> Michael Rubin and Ahmed K. Majidyar, *The Shi'ites of the Middle East: An Iranian Fifth Column?* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 18 July 2014).

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.



Recently, there have been large demonstrations in Kuwait urging greater representation for the Shi'ite population, and protests against Kuwaiti government actions in the Persian Gulf. In 2012, the government responded to the demonstrations by conducting a massive security raid in the Shi'ite section of the capital under the auspices of responding to security threats to the country and stemming the Iranian influence in the capital.<sup>92</sup> These security raids highlight the tension between Sunnis and Shi'ites in a relatively non-sectarian country. These activities also verify the competition in the country between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

The relatively small numbers of Shi'ites in Kuwait prevent Iran from dominating the country, but it does not impede their goal of expanding their influence. Additionally, after the 2003 U.S. invasion, the Shi'ite seizure of power in Iraq has given Iran a greater ability to pry into Kuwaiti affairs. Saudi Arabia has responded to this challenge by assisting the Salafis in Kuwait. Approximately 20 percent of the Kuwaiti parliament shares Salafi sentiments. This group is linked to Saudi Arabia through religion and has allowed Saudi Arabia to gain greater control over its neighbor. Both countries will continue to use their proxy groups to influence domestic politics within Kuwait.

#### **D. IMPLICATIONS**

Iran's most likely course of action within these three countries is to continue to foment unrest with some of the disenfranchised Shi'ites. Iran will attempt to use their religion, media, and covert military operations to force political changes in the region to weaken and distract its main adversary. Saudi Arabia will continue to confront Iranian attempts within the areas it feels are hers. The kingdom will continue to support the current rulers and the majority Sunni population to insure it has a strategic reach throughout the Middle East.

The fight in these countries between the two regional powers is nothing out of the ordinary. It is expected that both countries will battle to expand their influence; however, a possible solution to the Syrian civil war may lie in one of these countries. Actions

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<sup>92</sup> Hamad Al-Jasser, "Kuwait Arrests over 2,000 in Iranian Shiite Neighborhood," Al Monitor, 20 September 2012, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2012/09/kuwait-shiite-iranian-crackdown.html#>.

within these countries could be a potential peripheral agreement alongside Iran and Saudi Arabia's deal for peace in Syria.

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## V. THE GAME: OBTAINING PEACE

The Syrian civil war branch matrix in Figure 1 demonstrates the interaction between Saudi Arabia and Iran in relation to Syria. Each side has the ability to make two choices after observing the opponent's actions. Saudi Arabia begins the interaction by continuing to support the rebels or stopping support to the rebels. Iran has two choices for either of Saudi Arabia's actions. It can stop supporting Assad or it can continue supporting him. Prior to the negotiated deal, there is a 25 percent chance of moving to the peace process.<sup>93</sup> This can only occur if Saudi Arabia and Iran stop supporting their proxy militarily. If Saudi Arabia stops supporting the rebels while Iran continues to support Assad, then the rebels are in dire danger. If Saudi Arabia continues to support the rebels and Iran stops supporting Assad, his rule is endangered. Therefore, both sides choose to continue to support their proxies in Syria to prevent destruction of their force.

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<sup>93</sup> The 25 percent chance is derived from the four choices that are produced after both players' actions. The 25 percent chance is also derived from the assumption that all choices are weighted equally.

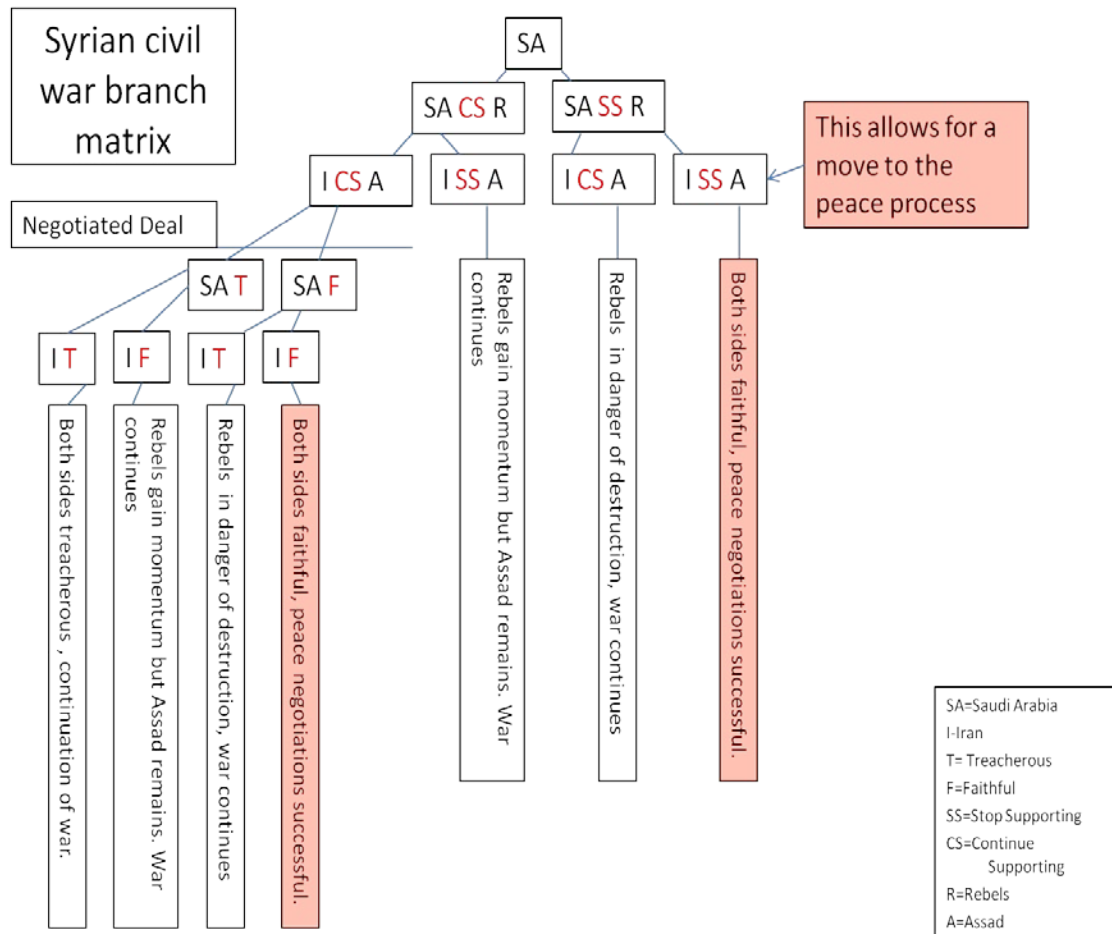


Figure 1. Syrian Civil War Branch Matrix.

Even after a negotiated deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia, there is only a 25 percent chance that the negotiated deal will be honored by both sides.<sup>94</sup> This matrix reveals the high likelihood that the war will continue and that both sides will be tempted to act treacherously during and after negotiations. This move toward treachery is the epitome of the prisoners' dilemma. The following game description will reveal how the stalemate in Syria has produced a prisoners' dilemma and show the only way of resolving this dilemma.

<sup>94</sup> Again, the 25 percent chance is derived from the assumption that all choices are weighted equally.

The game is a two-player game between the Syrian government represented by Iran, and the opposition represented by Saudi Arabia.<sup>95</sup> The Syrian government forces consist of Alawites, Christians, Shi'ites, and some Sunnis. The Syrian regime represents Iran, Russia, Iraq, and Lebanese Hezbollah. The opposition is composed of multiple Sunni Arab groups. The opposition represents Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the United States, Turkey, and Qatar.

For the purposes of this paper, we assume all actors will act in a rational manner. We also assume that both sides view rationality from the same perspective, and each side places the same value on each category of rationality. This is a broad assumption, but this assumption must be made to simplify the game enough to organize it in a two-player game.

The game also assumes that Saudi Arabia and Iran are leading their coalitions as unitary, rational actors. "According to International Relations (IR) theory, a unitary rational actor is a monolithic player who is capable of making rational decisions based on preference ranking and value maximization."<sup>96</sup> Some may criticize the unitary rational actor assumption because of the varying degrees of interests of the states within the coalition, but it can be argued the interests of Iran and Saudi Arabia fairly represent the values of each group. Additionally, both actors have the regional clout to place sufficient pressure on their partners in the union to gain their desired outcome.

The game will also be heavily influenced by prospect theory. Prospect theory is utility theory under the threat of risks. "Choices among risky prospects exhibit several persuasive effects that are inconsistent with the basic tenets of utility theory. In particular, people underweigh outcomes that are probable in comparison with outcomes that are obtained with certainty. This tendency, called the certainty effect, contributes to risk

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<sup>95</sup> The game is a two player game because we have determined that Iran and Saudi Arabia are the veto players in resolving the Syrian civil war. We recognize there are other internal and external actors, but those actors can be heavily influenced by either Iran or Saudi Arabia.

<sup>96</sup> Graham T. Allison, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," *The American Political Science Review* 63, no. 3 (September 1969): 702.

aversion in choices involving sure gains and to risk seeking in choices involving sure losses.”<sup>97</sup>

The conflict in Syria and the regional Middle East cold war can be viewed through the lens of prospect theory. The Assad regime controlled the entire country before the beginning of the civil war in 2011. This regime was on the verge of defeat during the first 18 months of the conflict, but it has since regrouped and now dominates major population centers from the western coast to central Syria. Assad may be viewing the conflict as being at a loss because any loss of territory would be worse than prior to the war; therefore, he would be more risk seeking. Conversely, he may view the conflict through the lens of the gains frame. The Assad government was on the brink of collapse, and now the regime has turned the corner to dominate much of Syria. The Assad regime may be risk averse and would settle for the territory it has regained. We hypothesize that Assad is in the gains frame of reference and would settle the conflict by giving the Kurds and Sunni Arabs semiautonomous regions, if he could maintain power in Damascus. The current situation in Syria can be viewed in Table 1 and Figure 2.

The current situation in Syria is a mutually hurting military stalemate, which is the best circumstance for bringing belligerents to the bargaining table. “A mutually destructive military stalemate is a conflict in which neither side can win unilaterally through military defeat of the other side.”<sup>98</sup> Both sides are losing men, equipment, money, and time. Neither side can strike a strategic blow against the other side. The conflict can only be decided by a negotiated settlement. The situation is now “ripe” for peace, because both sides second most-valued preference is negotiations. These negotiations will lead to peace. Both sides would prefer an outright win. The third best option is a continuation of war, because war drains resources and devastates the country. Finally, the worst option is a complete loss.

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<sup>97</sup> Kahneman and Tversky, “Prospect Theory,” 1.

<sup>98</sup> Clarke and Christopher, *From Stalemate to Settlement*, 4.

Table 1. Player Preferences in Current Situation of Civil War in Syria.

Syrian Civil War (Current Situation) Mutually Hurting Stalemate		
Assad Preferences		
Assad	Opposition	Ordinal Value
A	D	4 (Assad Total Win)
D	D	3 (Negotiation)
A	A	2 (Continuation of War)
D	A	1 (Opposition Total Win)
Opposition Preferences		
Assad	Opposition	Ordinal Value
D	A	4 (Opposition Total Win)
D	D	3 (Negotiation)
A	A	2 (Continuation of War)
A	D	1 (Assad Total Win)
A	Arm/Fight	Currently, Syria is a mutually hurting military stalemate. Neither side can win an outright military victory, but both parties cannot negotiate because neither side has met the desired end state of the sponsor states, Iran and Saudi Arabia.
D	Disarm/Negotiate	

The two-player game between Assad and the opposition is played in Figure 2. Assad is on the left and the opposition is on top. The letter “A” represents Arm/Fight and “D” represents Disarm/Negotiate. The likely outcome of the interaction is A, A (2, 2), which is both parties arming and war continues. The move to arm is both parties dominant strategy. The security of both sides is a 2, and the Nash Arbitration Fair Point value is a 3.<sup>99</sup> “The Nash Arbitration Fair Point should be a stable collective outcome in

<sup>99</sup> For the purposes of this paper, the thesis assumes that ordinal values are also cardinal values. That is, 4 is twice as good as 2.



which no actor has an incentive to depart from unilaterally.”<sup>100</sup> Both parties would prefer D, D (3, 3) war termination through negotiation. Neither party can get to this position due to the fact that neither side in the civil war has achieved the goals of the veto players, Iran and Saudi Arabia. The sponsor states prevent either side from moving to their second most utilitarian position and war continues. Therefore, we must satisfy the veto players in order to achieve a negotiated settlement in the Syrian civil war. This thesis hypothesizes that the veto players have not allowed the Syrian belligerents to negotiate honestly, but the regional powers have changed their goals to allow for negotiations in Syria. The following figures and tables will illustrate the changes in the perspectives of the sponsors of the proxy forces as the war has progressed and will reveal an opportunity to end the war in a negotiated settlement.

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<sup>100</sup> Josep Colomer, *Game Theory and Transition to Democracy: The Spanish Model* (Aldershot, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Company, 1995), 6.

## Syrian Civil War (Current Situation) Mutually Hurting Stalemate

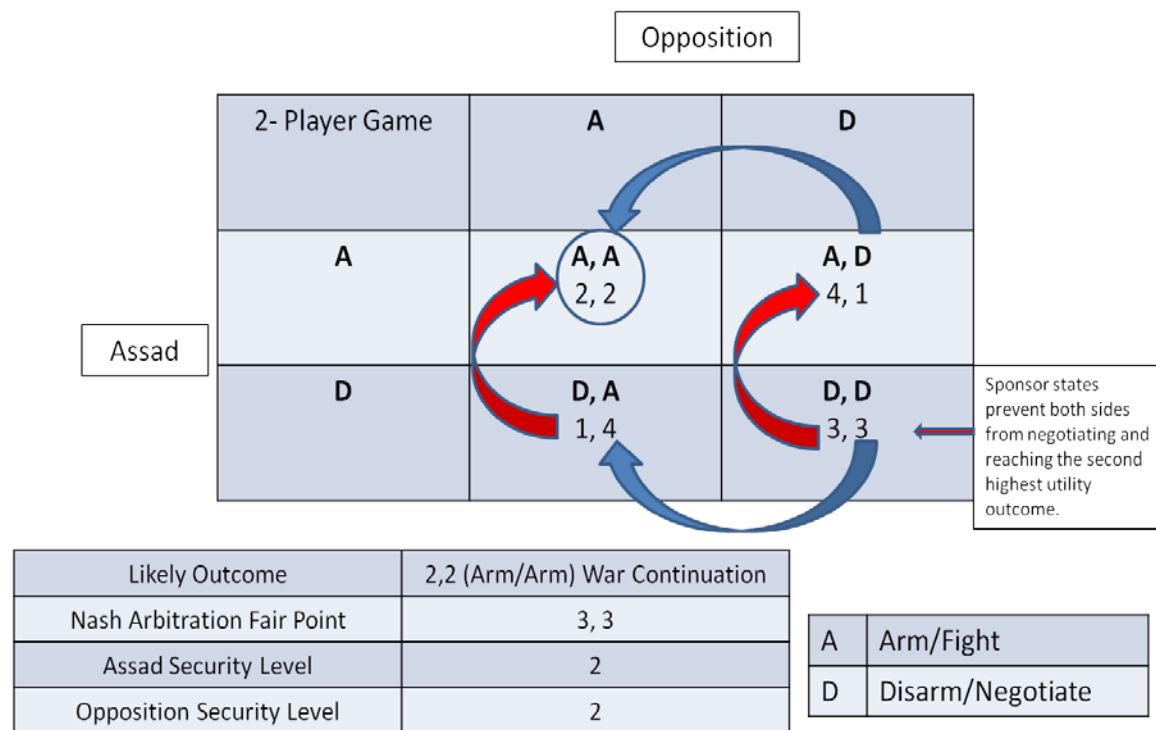


Figure 2. Game View of Current Situation.

Prospect theory also applies to the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia for Middle East dominance. Until 2003, Saudi Arabia dominated the competition in the Middle East. Then the United States' toppling of the Saddam regime created a void that was filled, to some degree by Iran in Iraq.<sup>101</sup> The changing of a Sunni regime to a Shia-dominated government began to tilt the Middle East competition toward Iran. The Jordanian King even proclaimed that, "A Shia crescent was forming which extended from Iran to the Levant."<sup>102</sup> Additional losses of Egypt to the Muslim Brotherhood and a growing Hezbollah movement in Lebanon began to increase Saudi Arabia's fear of

<sup>101</sup> Gregory F. Gause III, *Beyond Sectarianism: The New Middle East Cold War* (Doha, Qatar: Foreign Policy at Brookings, 2014), 11.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

falling behind in the cold war. Additionally, Shia uprisings in Kuwait, Bahrain, and Yemen further increased Saudi Arabia's paranoia. The current state of affairs was unbearable for Saudi Arabia, and it struck quickly when a crack opened in the Syrian government.

Since 2003, Iran's power has been trending higher. The defeat of Saddam removed Iran's greatest threat from its border. Simultaneously, the American invasion gave Iran an opportunity to become actively involved in Iraqi politics through the majority Shia population in southern Iraq. In the 2006 war, the success of the Iranian backed militia, Hezbollah, further strengthened Iranian legitimacy in the Middle East. Shia social movements in Kuwait, Yemen, and Bahrain further threatened the status quo in those countries. Iran's influence has even grown in Palestine with the support of Hamas, a Sunni militia.

Iran's string of successes hit a road bump when the Arab Spring moved to Syria in early 2011. Sunni groups moved from peaceful protest to armed conflict when the Assad regime used heavy-handed tactics to break the growing social movement. Iran has been drawn into the conflict by its support of the Assad regime. Syria is strategically important for Iran's ability to project power throughout the Middle East. "The Assad regime has provided crucial access to Iranian proxies, including Lebanese Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, allowing Iran to move people, weapons, and money to these groups through Syrian territory."<sup>103</sup>

Under the assumption that Saudi Arabia and Iran began their involvement in the Syrian civil war through the lens of the losses frame, Saudi Arabia obviously wanted to turn the Iranian momentum in the Middle East cold war. Iran did not want to lose a long-standing ally which is located in a strategic position along the Mediterranean and borders Lebanon. Both groups had the same ordinal value grouping. Both sides preferred an outright win and the worst outcome was a total loss. The second best value was arming/fighting, and the third overall value was negotiation. Both thought they could achieve their goals through fighting and both thought they could get a "cheap" win through proxy

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<sup>103</sup> Will Fulton, Joseph Holliday, and Sam Wyer, *Iranian Strategy in Syria* (Washington, DC: AEI Critical Threats Project and Institute for the Study of War, May 2013): 9.

forces. Saudi Arabia could turn an Iranian orbited state into a Saudi aligned nation, and Iran wanted to maintain the status quo in Damascus.

Some could argue that Iran would have settled for negotiations during this phase, but Tehran would not have allowed the meaningful changes the Syrian protestors wanted. The changes the protestors wanted would have greatly diminished Iranian influence in the region. As David Lesch observes:

In the summer of 2011, Iran began to openly encourage Bashar Al-Assad to implement the necessary reforms in order to stem the tide of protests; Tehran urged the Syrian government to curtail the violence and deal calmly with the opposition.<sup>104</sup>

The kind of changes that were required during the initial phase of the conflict would not have kept Assad in power. Additionally, even if some of the changes did keep Assad in power, the wealthy regime leaders would have been against any changes in the status quo. The demand for the status quo from elites would have prevented Assad from meeting the opposition's demands. The best Assad could do was cosmetic changes within the Syrian political system that would not satisfy the Syrian opposition. Therefore, Iran would not allow meaningful negotiations to occur, because those negotiations would lead to the removal of an Alawite regime that benefited their strategic interests.

To get to a mutual hurting military stalemate both sides need to have a negotiated settlement as their second utilitarian value. Both sides must switch the negotiated settlement value from the third best option to the second option. Through the course of the war, the utilitarian value of both sides has changed with the changing tides of war.

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<sup>104</sup> Lesch, *Syria*, 129.

Table 2. Status at Initial War Entry.

Iran/Saudi Cold War Iran losses frame/Saudi losses frame (Initial War Entry)		
Iran Preferences		
Iran	Saudi	Ordinal Value
A	D	4 (Iran/Assad Total Win)
A	A	3 (Continuation of War)
D	D	2 (Negotiation)
D	A	1 (Saudi/OPP. Total Win)
Saudi Preferences		
Saudi	Iran	Ordinal Value
D	A	4 (Saudi/OPP. Total Win)
A	A	3 (Continuation of War)
D	D	2 (Negotiation)
D	A	1 (Assad Total Win)
A	Arm/Fight	
D	Disarm/Negotiate	

Mutually Hurting Military Stalemate requires both players to have their second best outcome as a negotiated settlement.

The two-player game is represented in Figure 3. The two-player game pits Iran against Saudi Arabia. Iran is on the left and Saudi Arabia is on top. Both players can choose Arm/Fight or Disarm/Negotiate. The game's likely outcome is 3, 3 (Arm, Arm), which leads to continuation of the conflict. The security level of both groups is 3, and the Nash Arbitration Fair Point value is 3. Fighting is the preferred outcome for both sides, and negotiations are not possible to achieve during this phase of the war, with the value of 2, 2.

Iran/Saudi Cold War  
(Iran losses Frame/Saudi Losses Frame)  
Initial War Entry

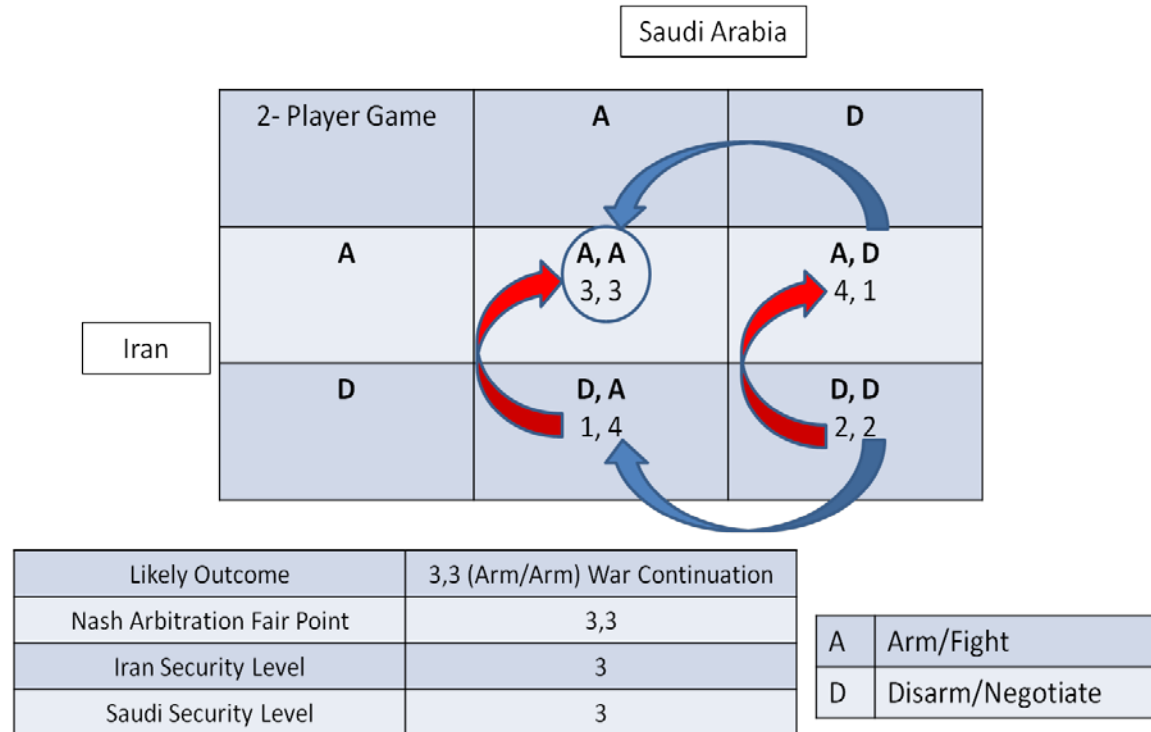


Figure 3. Player Movement at Initial War Entry.

Table 3 represents the two-party game between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Iran is in the losses frame and Saudi Arabia is in the winner frame. The timeframe for this table is late spring of 2013. Saudi Arabia is in the gains frame because the opposition is making considerable gains against Assad's forces. Saudi Arabia's values have changed. Saudi Arabia is risk averse because they are in the gains frame. They have changed their second and third values. A negotiated settlement is the second best option, and the continuation of war is the third best option.

During this phase Iran is in the losses frame, because Assad's forces are not faring well against the opposition. Iran could potentially lose an ally with whom they have had a strong bond for numerous decades. Additionally, the loss of the Assad's regime would severely cripple Iran's ability to project influence throughout the Levant. Iran's values

remain the same. They prefer an outright win, and Iran will continue arming and supporting Assad to achieve the desired outcome.

Table 3. Saudi Arabia Gains Frame/Iran Losses Frame.

Iran/Saudi Cold War (Saudi Gains Frame/Iran Losses Frame)		
Iran Preferences		
Iran	Saudi	Ordinal Value
A	D	4 (Iran/Assad Total Win)
A	A	3 (Continuation of War)
D	D	2 (Negotiation)
D	A	1 (Saudi/OPP. Total Win)
Saudi Preferences		
Saudi	Iran	Ordinal Value
D	A	4 (Saudi/OPP. Total Win)
D	D	3 (Negotiation)
A	A	2 (Continuation of War)
D	A	1 (Assad Total Win)
A	Arm/Fight	
D	Disarm/Negotiate	

Figure 4 displays the interaction between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The likely outcome of the game is 3, 2 (A, A), which is a continuation of war. The dominant strategy for both sides is to continue fighting. The Nash Arbitration Fair Point has decreased to 2.5. Iran's security level is greater than Saudi Arabia's security level. Iran is a 3, while the Saudi security level has decreased to 2. In this scenario, it is impossible to achieve peace. No strategic moves will allow either side to move to 2, 3 (D, D).

# Iran/Saudi Cold War (Saudi Gains Frame/Iran Losses Frame)

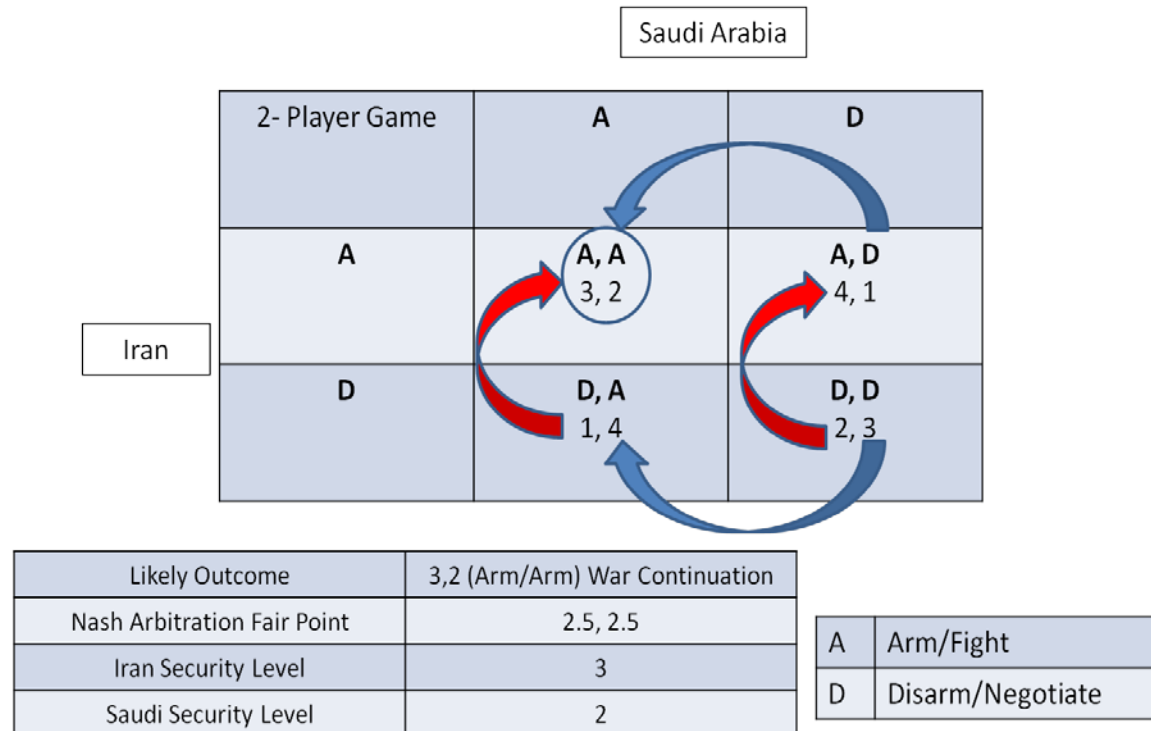


Figure 4. Saudi Arabia Gains Frame/Iran Losses Frame.

Table 4 represents the preferences of both Iran and Saudi Arabia during the time period of spring 2014. Both sides have switched frames of reference. Iran is in the gains frame and Saudi Arabia is in the losses frame. Iran is in the gains frame because Syrian government forces in conjunction with Hezbollah have reversed the initiative into their favor. The Syrian military has had a string of military victories, and the opposition is fracturing from infighting. Iran would now settle the conflict on favorable terms because of the success of the Syrian military.

Inversely, Saudi Arabia's fortunes in Syria have worsened with the military setbacks and the great divisions within the opposition forces. Saudi Arabia is in the losses frame of reference. Recently, Saudi Arabia had visions of regime change and a Syrian state entering their sphere of influence. Now they see a deal as less than optimal, and



would prefer continuing to fight to get a military win or a better position for future negotiation.

Table 4. Iran Gains Frame/Saudi Losses Frame.

Iran/Saudi Cold War (Iran Gains Frame/Saudi Losses Frame)		
Iran Preferences		
Iran	Saudi	Ordinal Value
A	D	4 (Iran/Assad Total Win)
D	D	3 (Negotiate)
A	A	2 (Continuation of War)
D	A	1 (Saudi/OPP. Total Win)
Saudi Preferences		
Saudi	Iran	Ordinal Value
D	A	4 (Saudi/OPP. Total Win)
A	A	3 (Continuation of War)
D	D	2 (Negotiation)
D	A	1 (Assad Total Win)
A	Arm/Fight	
D	Disarm/Negotiate	

In Figure 5, the two-player game between Iran and Saudi Arabia continues. Iran is in the gains frame and Saudi Arabia is in the losses frame. The likely outcome of the game is 2, 3 (A, A), which is a continuation of fighting. The dominant strategy for both sides is the continuation of fighting. The Nash Arbitration Fair Point of the game is 2.5. The security level for Iran is 2, and the security level for Saudi Arabia is 3. There is no way to get to negotiations in this game. The conflict must continue until both sides have reached a mutually hurting military stalemate.

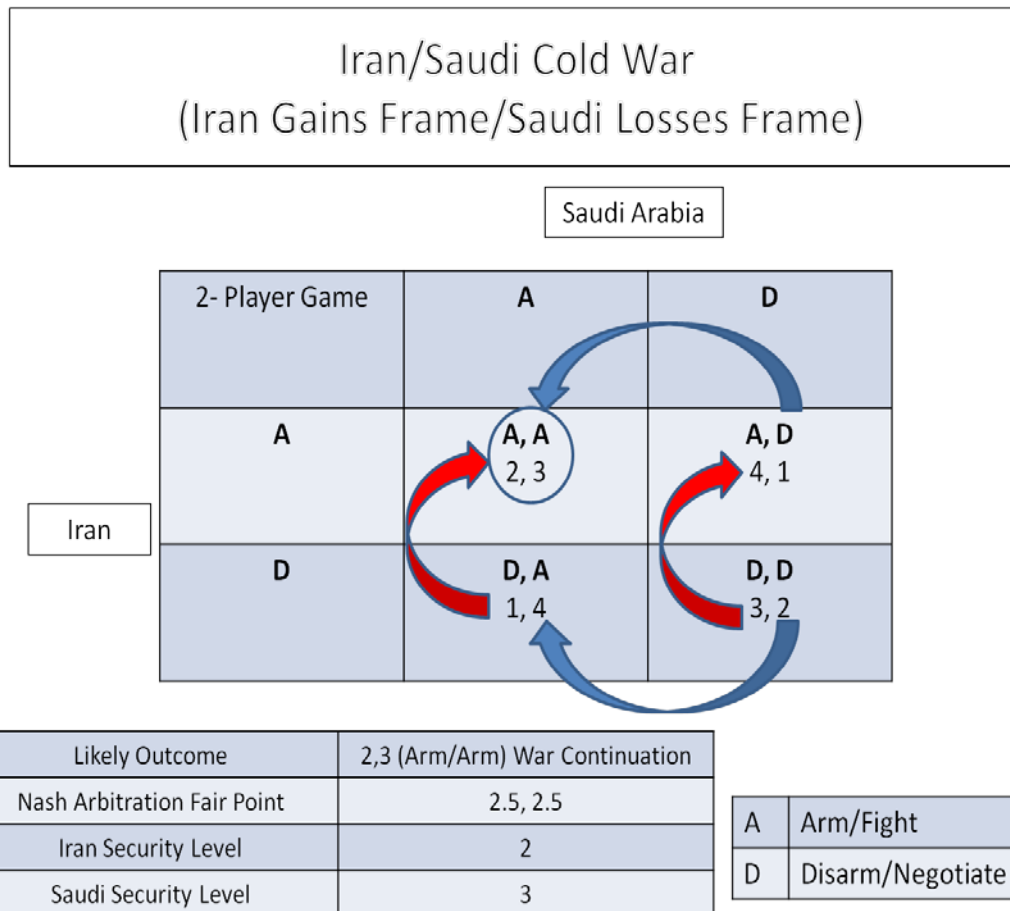


Figure 5. Iran Gains Frame/Saudi Losses Frame.

Table 5 reveals the current situation in Syria between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Both players are in the gains frame and their ordinal values are equal. Both believe negotiations are their second highest valued option. Saudi Arabia is currently in the gains frame because it has weakened the Syrian regime significantly, which inversely weakens Iran's power in the Levant. Saudi Arabia also believes it can capitalize on this weakness by gaining a semiautonomous Sunni state in central/eastern Syria. This semiautonomous region could wield political power in the Syrian government similar to the Kurdish autonomous region in Iraq.

Also, Saudi Arabia is prepared to settle the conflict because of the current fractures in the opposition force, and the "Frankenstein," which was developed by Arabian Peninsula funding ISIS, or Islamic State (IS). The divisions in the opposition are

well known. The secularist, Syrian Free Army (SFA) has had to compete with Islamic extremist groups such as the JN and IS. The competition for resources, funding, land, and money has led to infighting between the groups. The IS has been accused of attacking other opposition groups instead of the Syrian army. Additionally, IS has used their military strength to seize oil rich areas such as Deir Az Zowr from other opposition groups. IS has even been accused of tacit collaboration with the Syrian regime in which they share oil revenue with Assad's regime.<sup>105</sup> Currently, the weakened opposition forces are unable to effectively confront Assad's forces, and a decisive military defeat of the regime is impossible.

In May 2012, Assad said, "for the leaders of these countries (Opposition Sponsors) it is becoming clear that this is not 'spring,' but chaos. If you sow chaos in Syria, you may well be infected by it yourself, and they understand this perfectly well."<sup>106</sup> Saudi Arabia is suffering from the chaos in Syria and Iraq spreading to the kingdom. Saudi Arabia fears the growth of IS. IS was an effective tool which allowed Saudi Arabia to confront Assad's regime in Syrian and Malaki's regime in Iraq. The once proxy force has now developed into a monster which could stir up internal trouble within the kingdom. The combination of a potential autonomous Sunni Arab state in Syria, the weakening of the opposition front, and the emergence of SI has moved Saudi Arabia to the gains frame. The combination of the aforementioned factors has created a situation 'ripe' for negotiation.

Iran is in the gains frame. Assad's forces are making gains throughout the country, and international pressure against his regime has softened due to the emergence of IS and the crisis in Ukraine; however, civil wars are long affairs, and the tides of war can change throughout the contest. Assad cannot control the central and eastern portions of Syria, but the Syrian government still dominates the coastal areas and key cities within Syria. The Alawites could continue to dominate an Iran friendly central government that can strongly influence areas along the coast and exercise limited influence in other areas

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<sup>105</sup> Paul Mirengoff, "The ISIS-Assad Alliance" Power Line Blog, 15 July 2014, <http://www.powerlineblog.com/archives/2014/07/the-isis-assad-alliance.php#!>

<sup>106</sup> Ian Black, "Syria's Bashar al-Assad Vows to Display Captured Foreign Mercenaries," *The Guardian*, 16 May 2012, 1.

of the country. Iran would be satisfied with the current situation because it would maintain access, via Assad, to other proxy forces in the regions such as Hezbollah and Hamas. Even though the current situation in Syria favors Iran and Assad, we believe Iran would settle for negotiations. Iran would prefer negotiations to fighting because fighting wastes valuable resources such as money, men, time, effort, and diplomatic capital. Moreover, Iran could potentially gain increased stature in the Arab world by playing a key role in settling the bloody civil war.

Table 5. Saudi Gains Frame/Iran Gains Frame.



Iran/Saudi Cold War (Saudi Gains Frame/Iran Gains Frame)		
Iran Preferences		
Iran	Saudi	Ordinal Value
A	D	4 (Iran/Assad Total Win)
D	D 	3 (Negotiation)
A	A	2 (Continuation of War)
D	A	1 (Saudi/OPP. Total Win)
Saudi Preferences		
Saudi	Iran	Ordinal Value
D	A	4 (Saudi/OPP. Total Win)
D 	D	3 (Negotiation)
A	A	2 (Continuation of War)
D	A	1 (Assad Total Win)
A	Arm/Fight	
D	Disarm/Negotiate	

Figure 6 reveals the current interaction between the two sides. The likely outcome of the game is 2, 2 (A, A), continued warfare. The Nash Arbitration Fair Point of the

game is 3, 3. The score of 3, 3 is the most optimal point for both sides. The security level for both sides is a 2. Both parties should be maximizing each other and receive a 3, 3, but both sides move toward a lesser value at 2, 2. The interaction between the two players will be reviewed in detail in Figure 6.

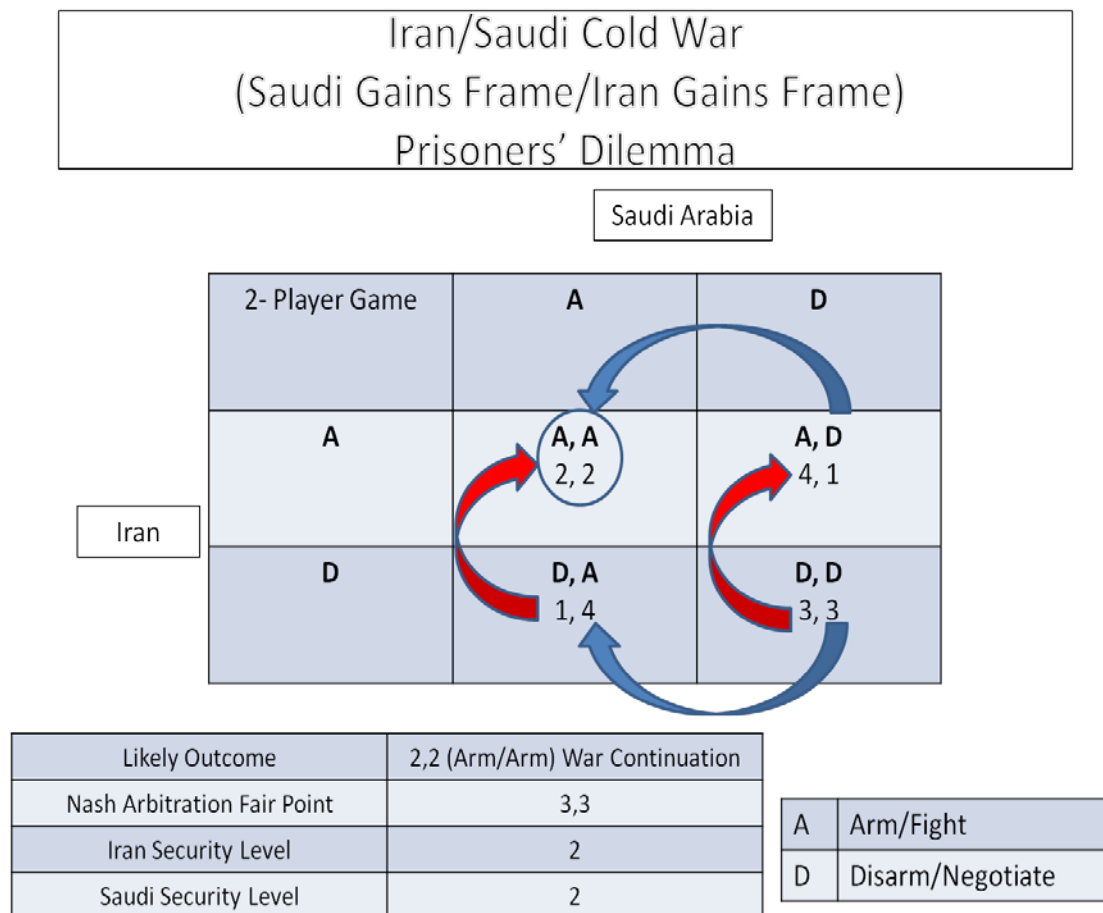


Figure 6. Saudi Gains Frame/Iran Gains Frame (Prisoner's Dilemma).

“The Prisoner's Dilemma is a game with an inefficient equilibrium which could be improved by communication and mutual threats between the parties.”<sup>107</sup> Figure 7 reveals the solution to the prisoners' dilemma. To allow each player to reach its second best value, the two sides must utilize strategic moves. Both sides can only utilize a promise to allow each player to move to D, D (3, 3) negotiated settlement. The solution

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 72.

between the two groups must be a communicated promise to allow the groups to move to substantial negotiations for lasting peace. That is the only way to ‘break’ the prisoner’s dilemma and maximize both sides of the conflict.

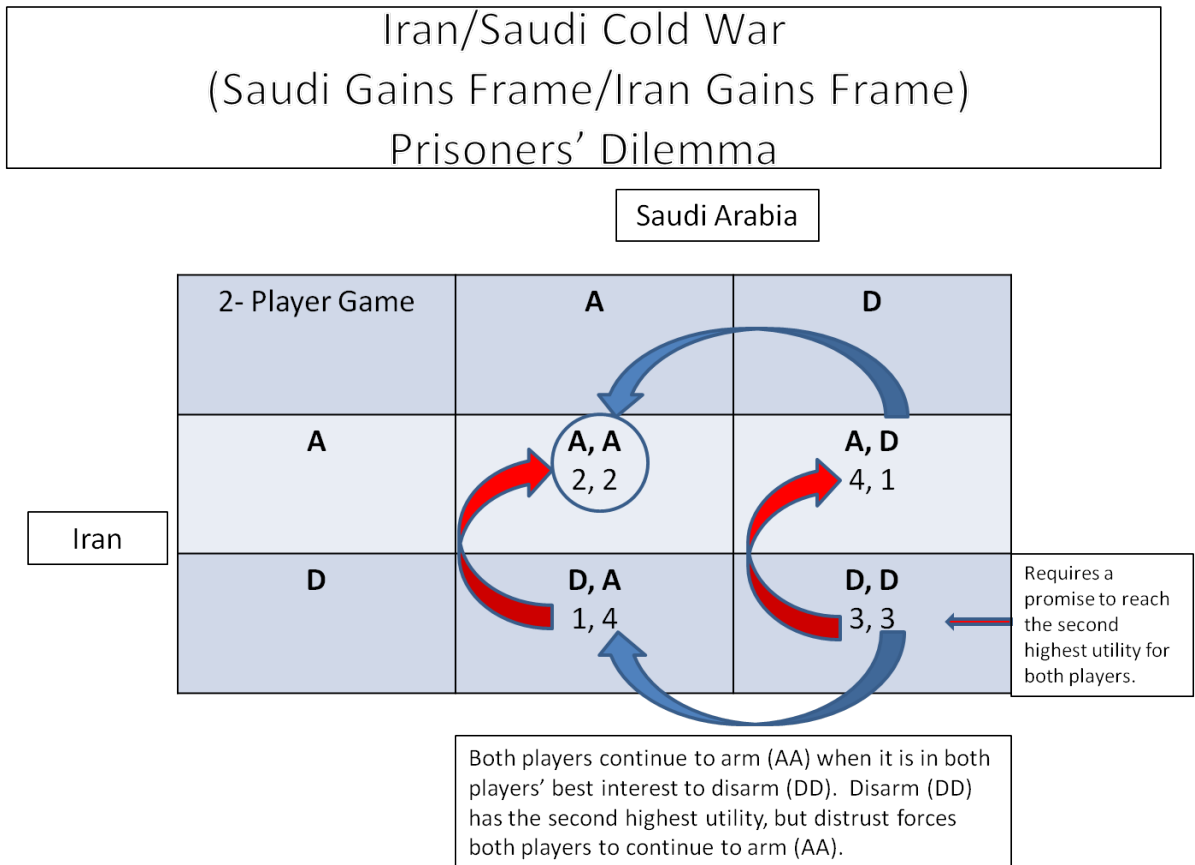


Figure 7. Solving the Prisoner’s Dilemma.

<b>First Move: Iran</b>			<b>First Move: Saudi</b>		
If Iran A Then Saudi C	2	2	If Saudi C Then Iran A	2	2
If Iran B Then Saudi C	1	4	If Saudi D Then Iran A	4	1
	2	2		2	2
Iran can secure likely outcome by A	3rd Best		Saudi can secure likely outcome by C	3rd Best	
<b>Threat: Iran</b>			<b>Threat: Saudi</b>		
Assumption: Threat on Saudi's likely strategy => threat on C			Assumption: Threat on Iran's likely strategy => threat on A		
Normally:			Normally:		
If Saudi C then Iran A	2	2	If Iran A then Saudi C	2	2
Threat:			Threat:		
If Saudi C then Iran B	1	4	If Iran A then Saudi D	4	1
Hurts Iran ? Yes			Hurts Saudi ? Yes		
Hurts Saudi ? No			Hurts Iran ? No		
Is it a threat ? No			Is it a threat ? No		

Figure 8. Strategic Games for the Prisoner's Dilemma in Figure 7.

Figure 8 represents strategic moves for the two-player game between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The only option either player has on improving his position is through a promise. A first move does not work because neither player can obtain anything greater than a 2. Neither player has a strategic threat, nor does a combination of the strategic moves improve either player's position. Only a strategic promise can allow them to maximize themselves and obtain their second best outcome, which is a 3.

## **VI. POWER-SHARING AGREEMENTS: NORTHERN IRELAND, YEMEN, LEBANON**

This chapter will briefly discuss three conflicts in the twentieth century that were peacefully negotiated. These include Northern Ireland, Yemen, and Lebanon. These negotiations are an example of what can occur in Syria to bring about a peaceful solution to the bloody conflict. Elements from each negotiation will be used in the following chapter to provide a framework for breaking the prisoners' dilemma and reaching a state of peace.

### **A. NORTHERN IRELAND: GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT**

The Good Friday Agreement reveals the need for pacifying both internal and external actors. The two external actors were the governments of London and Dublin. Within Northern Ireland, there were Protestant militias, including the Ulster Defense Association (UDA) and Catholic militias, such as the Ireland Republican Army (IRA). This resolution is unique because it features a dual clause that affects both internal and external actors. The external actors were so important to achieving peace that the agreement had to address the concerns of these actors. The Good Friday Agreement established power sharing within Northern Ireland between Catholics and Protestants and an agreement between Ireland and the United Kingdom on governing Northern Ireland.

Senator George Mitchell from the United States served as the special envoy and mediator to the Northern Ireland peace process. He is considered essential to passing the Good Friday Agreement. Senator George Mitchell outlined six principles to conducting negotiations. These principles laid the foundation for the peace discussions:

- All parties had to pledge to resolve all disagreements through a democratic process.
- All parties had to pledge to the total disarmament of militia organizations.
- All parties had to agree that the disarmament had to be transparent and verifiable by an outside organization.



- All parties had to renounce the use of violence to affect outcomes of the peace negotiations.
- All sides had to respect the outcome of the negotiations, and all sides had to resort to the democratic process to alter any outcome where they disagreed.
- Retribution killings or acts of violence toward opposing groups had to end immediately.<sup>108</sup>

These principles are simple and easy to understand. They were applied to the situation in Northern Ireland, but are universal and can be applied to the conflict in Syria. Resolving all issues through the political process is essential to any agreement. Any extra judiciary action would only provoke further violence and the prisoner's dilemma would continue. The disarmament of militias was essential to Ireland and it is vital to peace in Syria. The disarmament of groups such as ISIS, JN, FSA, and the Islamic Front is indispensable. Obviously, this is easier said than done. Some of the extremists will have to be militarily defeated or marginalized to allow for disarmament.

Another critical step was the release of prisoners of war. This was particularly important to the IRA since many of their operatives were in jail. This specific part of the peace process will be important to the Syrian opposition because some of their operatives are currently detained in Assad's prisons.

Ultimately, the conflict in Northern Ireland was resolved because of war weariness on both sides, and it is plausible this will also be the situation in Syria. The fighting erupted in 2011, and will more than likely continue for many years even though there is currently a military stalemate in the prisoners' dilemma. Unfortunately, it will take many more years and lives to achieve the level of war weariness that pushes all sides to a concerted effort that resolves the conflict peacefully.

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<sup>108</sup> Colin Knox and Padraic Quirk, *Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland, Israel and South Africa* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 39.

## **B. YEMEN: JEDDAH PACT**

From 1962 to 1970, the Yemeni civil war was fought between Royalists and Republicans. The Royalists were supported by Saudi Arabia and Jordan, the Republicans by Egypt. Great Britain and Russia played peripheral roles in the contest with their respective indirect support. In 1965, Saudi Arabia and Egypt struck a deal, which was known as the Jeddah Pact. This agreement served as a temporary ceasefire, and it prevented both Saudi Arabia and Egypt from directly intervening in Yemen's affairs. Saudi Arabia pledged not to support the Royalists in exchange for a promise from the Egyptians to stop supporting the rebels.<sup>109</sup>

The importance of the treaty is not the lasting peace that it was meant to procure, because later in the year fighting returned to Yemen. The significance of the pact is the initial discussion between the groups that eventually led to peace in 1970.<sup>110</sup> This is part of the promise required to break the prisoner's dilemma. Additionally, the deal reduced the influence of external agents such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

This arrangement is important to Syria for two reasons. First, the Syrian civil war will require a Jeddah Pact type of deal to remove direct foreign influences on the ground in Syria. Secondly, Syria will require at least a temporary ceasefire. This temporary ceasefire will allow both sides to break the prisoner's dilemma and reach their second best outcome of peace. Obviously, the world would prefer a permanent ceasefire, but a temporary one allows both sides to gain perspective on the situation allowing for future dialogue and eventual negotiated peace.

## **C. LEBANON: TAIF ACCORDS**

The Taif Agreement (Document of National Accord) was the agreement signed in 1989 that provided the basis for the end of the conflict in Lebanon. The treaty was largely based on the National Pact of 1943.<sup>111</sup> This agreement was successful because it had the

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<sup>109</sup> Clarke and Paul, *From Stalemate to Settlement*, 28.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Hassan Krayem, "The Lebanese Civil War and the Taif Agreement," American University of Beirut, 1998, <http://ddc.aub.edu.lb/projects/pspa/conflict-resolution.html>.

blessing of numerous external actors, including Iran, the United States, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and France.

The agreement addressed both internal political reform and the Lebanese right of sovereignty. The demographic change in Lebanon caused by the growth of the Muslim population prompted the change in the confessional system of representation in Lebanon.<sup>112</sup> The confessional system in Lebanon is a shared-power system in which Christians occupy the seat of the presidency, Sunnis hold the position of prime minister, and Shi'ites occupy the speaker position in Parliament. This system was altered to give Muslims positions of greater power at the expense of the Christian president.<sup>113</sup>

The other major issue confronted by the accord is the Lebanese right of sovereignty. This was a major test for the country in regards to Syria and Israel. Both countries were fighting to obtain greater influence in the Lebanon to create strategic depth. The eventual eviction of both countries from Lebanese soil did not end their meddling, but did greatly reduce their influence. This key component of the Taif Agreement made it possible for Lebanon to focus on its own internal issues without outside involvement.

These two main points in the Taif Agreement are directly applicable to resolving the Syrian civil war peacefully. Syria must develop a confessional system of government to allow universal involvement in the political process. Each of the main groups can get a position such as president, prime minister, and speaker of parliament. Additionally, parliament can be divided along sectarian lines to give fair representation to all groups. This representation does not have to be proportional to the size of the group. Each confessional group can be allocated a certain number of seats in parliament depending upon the agreed ratio. The confirmation of Syria's sovereignty will also be critical to resolution. The Syrian people must be free of outside influences to obtain peace. Iran and Saudi Arabia can assist with this by preventing other actors in their coalition from interfering in the peace process.

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<sup>112</sup> Krayem, "The Lebanese Civil War and the Taif Agreement."

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

Finally, the Taif Agreement demanded the disarmament of all militia groups except Hezbollah.<sup>114</sup> This is essential in all peace treaties, and will also be an important step in achieving peace in Syria. The militia leaders will have to be given positions within the new government in exchange for laying down their arms and giving up their power. This will not be an easy task, and some of the militia leaders could be potential spoilers of the peace process. These leaders will have to be identified early and marginalized if they disrupt the peace process.

Aspects of each of the aforementioned examples can now be utilized to lay out the path to Syrian peace.

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<sup>114</sup> Hezbollah was allotted an exception to this clause because it was considered a resistance group in southern Lebanon.

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## VII. CONCLUSION

The Syrian civil war is currently a mutually destructive military stalemate ripe for resolution. Only a promise to disarm can break the current prisoner's dilemma/mutually destructive military stalemate in Syria. Both sides (domestic and international) are at a military impasse and neither is likely to gain much from additional fighting. The initial step to resolving the overall conflict should be a brokered ceasefire. This ceasefire will probably be the result of secret backchannel discussions between Iran and Saudi Arabia along with their proxy force. Clarke and Paul believe that backchannel talks are critical to peace negotiation processes. They claim that the exchange of thoughts on the peace process between two sides allows both sides to understand whom they can and cannot deal with during peace negotiations.<sup>115</sup> If the ceasefire can hold for any length of time, then the two sides can begin a tit-for-tat strategy with incremental agreements slowly moving to an all-encompassing peaceful solution.

The initial ceasefire would be a simple truce to prevent the spread of violence. The ceasefire should include a lack of maneuvering on either side to prevent one side from gaining an advantage during this period. Both sides can establish mechanisms to determine if either side is cheating during this phase. Neither side is particularly vulnerable during this phase because neither side has to surrender weapons or land. If either side detects that the other is being treacherous then that side can always return to fighting. It is important to note that the terms of the ceasefire may be broken incidentally or purposely, but the initial ceasefire did not make either side vulnerable allowing both parties to return to the negotiation table later to discuss the ceasefire. This initial ceasefire can work along the lines of the Jeddah Pact. Originally judged a failure because of the return to violence, the pact ultimately planted the seeds of success by creating dialogue between the parties.

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<sup>115</sup> Clarke and Paul, *From Stalemate to Settlement*.

During this phase, the government should accept the opposition as legitimate political leaders instead of terrorists. The legitimization of the Provincial Irish Republican Army reduced violence in Northern Ireland and greatly assisted the negotiation process.<sup>116</sup> The opposition's entrance into politics and the negotiation process provides a forum to express their views instead of violent operations on the streets of Syria. Additionally, the political process has a moderating effect on insurgents. The opposition has to begin operating within the norms of the political process to appeal to constituents. Insurgents must attempt to move from the periphery of the political spectrum to the more moderate center to obtain more support. The inclusion of insurgents into the political process is a win for both sides as it serves a legitimizing and moderating function.

This period and other rounds of peace negotiations are vulnerable to spoilers, one of the greatest threats to the peace process. "Spoilers are leaders and parties who believe that peace emerging from negotiations threatens their power, worldview, and interests, and use violence to undermine attempts to achieve it."<sup>117</sup> Potential spoilers in the Syrian peace negotiations could be players on either side of the domestic conflict, or any external player, who does not believe it is currently benefiting from the negotiated settlement. The two veto players, Iran and Saudi Arabia, could protect the peace negotiations from both internal and external spoilers. This is easier for Iran because its coalition singularly supports the Syrian government. The Saudi side is much more difficult because of the fractured opposition movement and competing external actors. Saudi Arabia would have to place pressure on its allies to prevent them from supporting any group within Syria that is not committed to the peace process.

Stephen John Steadman suggests a method of dealing with spoilers:

First, the choice of an appropriate strategy requires the correct diagnostics of the type of spoiler and thoughtful consideration of constraints posed by other parties in the peace process. Second, to make good diagnosis policy makers must overcome organizational blinders that lead them to misread intentions and motivations. Third, the implementation of a successful

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<sup>116</sup> Clarke and Paul, *From Stalemate to Settlement*.

<sup>117</sup> Stephen John Steadman, "Negotiation and Mediation in Internal Conflicts," in *The International Dimension of Internal Conflict*, ed. M. Brown (Boston: MIT Press, 1996), 369–371.

strategy depends on the custodian's ability to create an external coalition for peace, the resources that the coalition brings to its responsibility, and the consensus that the coalition forms about the legitimacy of spoiler demands.<sup>118</sup>

One particularly troublesome spoiler in Syria will be the local warlords in the opposition movement and leading figures in the regime who have built a "fiefdom" out of the chaos of the civil war. Aaron Lund points out that disunity within Syria is a major hurdle to any negotiated solution to the conflict for the following reasons:

1. A legitimate and cohesive opposition will be necessary to control the military factions and their commanders, thus preventing 'warlordism.'
2. If Bashar is removed in an internal coup and the regime remains largely intact, it will only want to bring opposition elements into government as a fig leaf of political pluralism; however, if the opposition is strong and united, it can use this opportunity to push for more reforms than it could otherwise.
3. If there is an internationally negotiated solution that keeps Bashar in power, the regime may be compelled to co-opt opposition elements in order to regain some lost legitimacy, thus once again offering an opportunity for a real, united opposition to press for political reforms.<sup>119</sup>

Aron Lund acknowledges these figures will be crucial in creating a lasting peace. They can either cause trouble due to a lack of interest in the peace process, or they can also be co-opted by either side to bring a lasting peace. Negotiators must be made aware of these individuals and insure they are either satisfied or marginalized during the peace process.

After the ceasefire, there should be intermediate agreements along the lines mentioned earlier in the tit-for-tat strategy, which allows trust to be developed on both sides. One side acts in good faith and then waits to see if the other side reciprocates. The earlier agreements should focus on subjects that most can agree upon and then engage in

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<sup>118</sup> Stephen J. Steadman, "Spoiler Problems in the Peace Process," *International Security* 22, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 5–53.

<sup>119</sup> Aron Lund, *Divided They Stand: An Overview of Syria's Political Opposition Factions* (Uppsala, Sweden: Olof Palme International Center, Foundation for European Progressive Studies, May 2012), 2.



more difficult negotiations over sharper differences. The earlier rounds could concentrate on ideas such as humanitarian assistance, refugee relief, and security.

International actors in Syrian affairs must be limited during the peace process, except for the veto players, Iran and Saudi Arabia. The three cases mentioned in Chapter VI all had a withdrawal of foreign interest in the conflicted country. Iran and Saudi Arabia must develop an agreement in which they will prevent other actors within their coalition from acting unilaterally in Syria during the peace process. As veto players, they can ultimately alter the actions of countries such as Qatar and Turkey. Without this step, there will not be a successful peace treaty in Syria.

A combination of all three hypotheses outlined in Chapter I of this paper will produce the best chance for peace. The peace process must include a regional solution and some form of power sharing. Autonomous regions are not necessary, but they would provide space for the opposition to come to the negotiation table. As mentioned throughout the thesis, Iran and Saudi Arabia must be satisfied with any negotiated solution to achieve lasting peace. Once those actors are satisfied, the next step would be to develop separate semiautonomous regions for Arab Sunnis and Syrian Kurds. This could be accompanied by United Nations' enforced no-fly zones. These areas would provide all parties political space to put down their arms and begin to join the political process. The semiautonomous areas would give the opposition room to mobilize for a peaceful inclusion into the Syrian government.

Simultaneously, Syria would require a neutral third-party peacekeeping force to insure no party departs from the agreed upon articles of the last round of negotiations. This is an essential component of all peacekeeping operations. This nonbiased force allows the insurgents to do what they have to do, but leaves the group extremely vulnerable. The insurgents must demobilize militarily, put down their weapons, and return seized land in exchange for participation in the political process. The peacekeeping force could also act as a referee to prevent either side from dishonesty. Obtaining a peacekeeping force in Syria will be extremely difficult because of the savage war being fought. The force will have to be a multinational force under the auspices of the United Nations.

Once a neutral third-party security force is in place, the negotiations can focus on more difficult subjects such as division of resources and political, as well as military power sharing. The majority of the oil and natural gas wealth lies in the Sunni Arab and Kurdish areas of Syria, but the exportation facilities are along the coast areas that are Christian and Alawite. All parties would have to develop some type of revenue sharing from the limited natural resource wealth in Syria. This revenue sharing scheme can be based on proportionality to the population of the group or it can be an even split among all of the groups. The method is unimportant, but the negotiators need to know that they must deal with this issue.

The most important topic of conversation will be power sharing. This will be in government and in the military. Additionally, many people will wonder if Assad will stay. He will remain in power in Syria even after a negotiated settlement. Assad would never allow a negotiated settlement to sweep him away from power. Iran could possibly allow another person in the Assad administration, which might be more palatable to the opposition, to continue to serve as president, but this is doubtful. Assad has survived the worst of the revolution and has tightened his grip on government and security apparatuses. The world may be stuck with Assad for many years, but a logical agreement could be made where there are term limits on the office of the president. This is a long-term solution that would remove Assad from office in the future.

According to the U.S. State Department, in 2012, the demographics of Syria were approximately 65 percent Sunni Arab, 11 percent Alawite, 10 percent Christian, 9 percent Kurd, and 4 percent other.<sup>120</sup> The power-sharing agreement in Syria should include the four major groups in Syria. Each group could have a significant position, such as president, prime minister, minister of defense, and minister of the interior. There should also be a sharing of power in the parliament. A proportional representation will not be allowed because minorities such as Alawites and Christians would be powerless due to the overwhelming Sunni Arab majority. The Syrian parliament would have to build a quota system. For example, Alawites only make up 11 percent of the population, but the

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<sup>120</sup> U.S. Department of State, Report on Syrian Demographics (Washington DC: U.S. Department of State, 2012).

Alawites would not settle for only 11 percent of the future parliament due to their recent domination of Syria. They would probably demand at least 25 percent of the seats in parliament.

The negotiating parties can do everything mentioned previously and still not achieve peace because they have only been looking within Syria. The solution may be found external to Syria's physical boundaries. Both sides are currently locked in a mutually hurting military stalemate producing the prisoners' dilemma in Syria, but Iran probably has a slight edge in achieving its goals in the conflict. Assad remains in power and the opposition is fractured. Additionally, IS has become a potential Frankenstein for Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia might have to throw in an additional incentive to get Iran to agree to a palatable deal for both sides in Syria. The most likely course of action would be to give the Houthis greater representation in Yemen. They have already seized large parts of the capital. If not Yemen, perhaps Bahrain would be a good point of discussion. Saudi Arabia could let the Shi'ite majority on the island have greater political influence. Either of these considerations would be tempting to Iran. Ultimately, Iran could make Saudi Arabia offer other incentives throughout the region as part of the grand bargain to allow both sides to break through the prisoners' dilemma.

The bloody conflict in Syria has claimed numerous lives since 2011, and it is estimated that the fighting will continue for many years, even though a clear military victory is impossible to achieve for either side. Therefore, this military stalemate has made now the time for resolution. Both internal and external actors are at an impasse in Syria, and Iran and Saudi Arabia should be prepared to maximize themselves through negotiation. The process that initially breaks the prisoner's dilemma will be a temporary ceasefire. This temporary ceasefire must flourish with positive tit-for-tat dialogue that will lead to substantial negotiations, until a peaceful resolution is secured.

It is hoped that both sides realize they are situated in a military stalemate, and realize it is not worth the gamble to continue the bloody conflict, because numerous lives could be improved through peace. It is in the best interest of all parties to reduce the violence and return to the negotiating table. Breaching the prisoner's dilemma is the only

method of finding peace, and this can only be achieved with a strategic moves promise that allows all actors to maximize themselves.

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